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# Sympathy, Gender, and the Writing of Value in Late Eighteenth Century English Letters.

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**Sympathy, gender, and the writing of value in late eighteenth  
century English letters**

**Cole, Lucinda, Ph.D.**

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Sympathy, Gender, and the  
Writing of Value  
in Late-Eighteenth-Century English Letters

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by  
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## **Contents**

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Introduction: Sympathy and/in History</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Part One: Ethics and Aesthetics</b>	<b>50</b>
Chapter One: The Logic of Sympathy	51
Chapter Two: Women, Men, and the Sympathetic Sublime	94
<b>Part Two: Early Feminism and Sympathetic Response</b>	<b>137</b>
Chapter Three: The Female Body Politic	138
Chapter Four: Wollstonecraft, More, and the Limits of Sympathy	181
<b>Conclusion: Sympathy, Gender, and the Writing of Value</b>	<b>224</b>
<b>Works Cited</b>	<b>255</b>
<b>Vita</b>	<b>279</b>

### Abstract

This study of sympathy is best described as an historically-grounded feminist critique in response to a contemporary critical debate. Recently, "sympathy," "compassion," and "care" have been promoted by many scholars interested in positing alternatives to a clearly masculinist ethical tradition derived from Kant, Hegel, and others. Yet missing from this work is a critical examination of the ethical tradition extending from Hume's writings in the eighteenth century to Max Scheler's in our own. My major purpose within this context is to demonstrate how sympathy functions as a major term in systems of value no less male-biased than the ethics of reason it is sometimes presumed to replace.

Drawing upon insights from post-structuralist feminisms and Michel Foucault, I first examine A Treatise of Human Nature, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, and eighteenth-century accounts of the sympathetic sublime. Here "mutual sympathy"--a presumably egalitarian social ideal--turns upon an identification with a principle of pleasure and power from which "woman" (or the "feminine") is clearly excluded. The moral communities promoted by Hume, Smith, Burke, and Wordsworth are, I argue, paralleled by overtly political ones in writers such as Rousseau. The discourse of sympathy thus had immediate implications for eighteenth-century women who struggled, like middle-class men, to articulate a place for themselves within the social order, and through the systems of value available to them at the time. In Part Two of this

study, I examine how Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, and Hannah More (despite their different political agenda) all employ the language of sympathy in compensatory arguments that women are the "natural" source of social bonds more important to the state than the "mutual sympathy" celebrated by and confined to "virtuous" men.

From this historicist perspective, I pinpoint the emergence of two competing versions of community naturalized during the nineteenth century. Finally, through analyses of Max Scheler's The Nature of Sympathy and Carol Gilligan's A Different Voice, I demonstrate in the conclusion that these gendered versions of community are, for better or worse, still being promoted today.

## Introduction: Sympathy and/in History

According to popular wisdom, women are more compassionate than men. That is why, some would argue, women are the primary caretakers of children; why women are drawn to low-paying "people professions"; and why, even given their comparatively reduced economic circumstances, women are more likely than men to be involved in philanthropical and charitable work. This association between women and compassion, moreover, is at least two centuries old. In the late-eighteenth century, for example, Hannah More argued that women have a distinct and special moral sense--an almost physical openness to the pains of others--that makes them more adept than men at fulfilling humanitarian obligations: "charity is the calling of a lady," she insists, and "the care of the poor is her profession" (Works II: 409). And in an 1839 conduct book so popular that it went through sixteen editions in two years, Sarah Stickney Ellis noted what she called women's "moral greatness," the "ability to seek their own happiness in the happiness of others" (1640). Finally, in this century, Carol Gilligan has argued in her study of women's psychological and moral development, that women, unlike men, tend to "define themselves in a context of human relationship," to "judge themselves in terms of their ability to care" (17). On the basis of these few examples, supplemented by one's own common sense, it is possible to see

why women have often been so instrumental in local reform, and why so many women have proudly asserted what Ellis calls their "disinterested kindness."

Historically, however, as other feminists have pointed out, such claims to a "separate" moral disposition have been allied with woman's removal to the home and her secondary social status.<sup>1</sup> It is a commonplace of social history, for example, that the notion of a separate moral nature for men and women is directly related to changing economic and domestic arrangements in England and America.<sup>2</sup> The mid-eighteenth century marked the rise of a market economy in which, according to one critic, "for the first time in English history the middle-class family seemed to need only the work of the man" (Todd 1986, 17). Correspondingly, in articles entitled "There is a Sort of Sex in Souls" and "The Virtues have respectively a Masculine and Feminine Cast," popular writers such as Addison and Steele began to promote a "doctrine of sexual virtues" by which women's removal to the home and family was cast as part of some seemingly "natural" domestic arrangement (1986, 20). As Steele writes, "Women were formed to temper Mankind and sooth them into Tenderness and Compassion" (Spectator No. 411). While this power of positive "influence" over men undoubtedly marked an improvement over traditional views of women as evil temptresses or self-effacing saints, it nevertheless supported the idea that women are moral creatures only insofar as they are removed from public power where "real" decisions were made.

The public-private dichotomy, and the doctrine of sexual virtues by which it is justified, has thus provided a knotty problem for feminists, all of whom desire to obviate women's secondary social and moral status. The solutions to this problem, however, change from writer to writer throughout the history of feminism. Generally speaking, what More, Ellis, and Gilligan have in common is a desire to increase the social value allotted to women without denying traditional female roles: caring wife, loving mother, loyal helpmate and friend. Their solution, instead, is to re-value the roles to which women have been assigned. Critics of nineteenth-century culture, for example, will immediately recognize this celebration of woman's compassionate qualities as part of what Judith Newton has called "the ideology of woman's proper sphere," through which middle-class women sought to "extend to themselves the sense of meaningful work, social significance, and social power" that were already part of the class and gender identity of middle-class men (Newton 1987, 127). Yet given the historical relationship between the assertion of some "feminine" moral disposition and women's limited social roles, it is often difficult to discern whether writers such as More, Ellis, and Gilligan are in collusion with a male-biased culture, or whether their arguments, as they seem to think, are indeed strategies through which that culture might actually be reformed. Critics of their position, for example, have sometimes suggested that the limited roles of women are responsible for the fact that women are devalued, so that the roles

themselves must be called into question--that is, expanded, reformed, or simply denied. Much like Virginia Woolf, they desire to "kill" the "angel in the house" so that women, like men, can practice a socially-valued profession. At times, these different "solutions" to a common political problem have appeared to create a seemingly irreconcilable tension within feminism itself.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of this study, at the broadest level, is to place this tension within the context of eighteenth-century ethical writing which, I believe, was partly responsible for creating the divisions that still inform feminist theory and practice today. However, unlike the critics mentioned above, I take it as axiomatic that at issue in each of these arguments for a moral nature peculiar to women--or, for that matter, in the arguments against them--is not simply a causal relation between ethics and economics, which might be resolved through reforming one or the other.<sup>4</sup> It is also, and perhaps more fundamentally, a complicated relationship between moral writing, one's sense of worth, and the social roles which (for better or worse) both men and women have learned to play--the way that people have been forced to respond to themselves as moral and social subjects. While traditional feminist arguments for ethical or economic reform are more or less politically viable reactions against the symptoms of an asymmetrical culture, they cannot take into account the powerful influence of a history of ethical writing itself--both the way in which it helped give rise to this asymmetry in the first place, and the way in which, I

believe, it continues to sustain it today.

### The Writing of Value

Ethical discourse not only creates particular emotions and dispositions for men and women; it places what is created within a hierarchy of values which maintains woman's traditional status as man's social and moral inferior. This hierarchy of values is immediately apparent in the history of traditional Christian morality, in which even the "best" woman must be regarded as the "weaker vessel," as friend and helpmate to man. It is less apparent, however, in the more secular accounts of morality as promoted by Addison, Steele, and others, in part because the "compassionate" qualities of women appear to be roundly celebrated, and even held up as an example to less compassionate men. In other works, however, the hierarchy of values intrinsic to the doctrine of sexual virtues is much more explicit. For example, in his second Moral Essay ("Of the Characters of Woman"), Pope, like Addison and Steele, attempts to convince women that they possess a special morality, distinguished from that of men:

But grant, in Public Men sometimes are shown,

A Woman's seen in Private life alone:

Our bolder Talents in full light display'd,

Your Virtues open fairest in the shade. (199-203)

Women's "virtues," he maintains, are best suited to family life, while men's are best suited to the public world. While he appears to be outlining a "separate but equal" doctrine of morality, the doctrine of sexual virtues in fact actually



works to promote the greater moral glory and power of men. Thus, inadvertently perhaps, Pope makes woman's secondary moral and social role in the family explicit: the "ideal" woman, he writes, "Charms by accepting, by submitting sways,/Yet has her humor most, when she obeys" (263-4). In the end Pope suggests that the real power of the virtuous woman is little more than the ability to conceal from men that she has any power at all.

If this poem can be taken as representative of eighteenth-century writing, it is clear that women occupied an ambivalent place on the social and moral scale.<sup>5</sup> To endow women with such obviously secondary virtues, after all, is something of a back-handed compliment, which takes away as much as it gives. Yet precisely because this status is intermediate it was difficult for eighteenth-century women writers to confront. It is telling, for example, that Pope's portrayal of the ideal woman provoked a variety of responses from women: whereas Hannah More appropriated it for her argument that women, who are different from and perhaps even morally superior to men, should end their "petty and absurd contentions for equality" (Works VI: 142), Mary Wollstonecraft attacked him for erecting a "false system of female manners" that "robs the whole sex its dignity" (Rights of Woman 53). It is equally significant that the responses to Pope's poem all turn on the question of the relationship between manners and one's social value, or, to use Wollstonecraft's word, the "dignity" of the sex. This suggests that the problem of women's social and moral

secondariness--and the problematical history of feminism to which it gives rise--involves not merely a relationship between ethics and economics, but the ways in which women internalize the values and norms by which they are defined--the way in which we respond to ourselves as moral subjects. As Agnes Heller puts it, "Without our commitment, norms are mere shadows" (1988, 12). From this point of view, at stake in the arguments for or against a separate morality is more than social history, a history of ethics, or even a history of gender roles. At stake is also the history of value, or the claims by which various social arrangements are promoted and justified.

This shift from traditional realms of inquiry to what I call the "writing of value" is intended to uncover the problematical relationship between ethics and politics, or, more precisely, to uncover the intrinsically political nature of ethical language. This, however, is a complicated issue. The "writing of value" must be regarded as a self-reflexive term that signifies two interrelated aspects of ethical practice. First, it assumes with post-structuralist feminists that Western culture is inherently male-biased, and that language is instrumental in this process. As one writer puts it, "Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested" (Weedon 21). As one language among many, moral writing serves to "shape" the social, to give it form on the written page, even as it creates embodied selves upon which those forms of social

organization are dependent.

Yet within the realm of representation ethical language serves a peculiar function. Unlike law, medicine, science, or a host of other discourses, ethical language is axiological language, which means that it is involved in the self-conscious writing of value, that is, in establishing the half-spoken rules of combination which enable something to be regarded as valuable or worthy in the first place. These rules or standards are themselves as male-biased as the cultures from which they derive, as the latin root word for "value" attests (valere means "to be strong"). Secondly, then, the "writing of value" also refers to the strategies by which some thing, behavior, or person is accorded intrinsic value or worth, where those strategies reflect and reinforce a culture in which "masculine" virtues serve as the universal standards by which all people should be judged. This point is central to feminist analysis, since it means that the "virtues" of women, in so far as they are different from those of men, will never be equally esteemed. That difference in social value has less to do with the nature of the virtues themselves than it does with the masculinist bias of ethical inscription, the way it determines what is to be valued--what is worthy of esteem--within an historically-specific context.

The "writing of value" thus does not refer to a body of ethical writing, but to the process by which I believe ethical writing works. Ideally, this more flexible view of ethical language enables one to analyze ethics as a pervasive social practice in which both women and men participate. In

this sense, my purpose is to "problematize" ethical language, to raise it, paraphrasing Foucault, as a problem that is at once a constituent of our history and one that is constituted by our history (1984, 376). To that end, I shall here analyze the ethics of sympathy, a tradition of moral writing extending roughly from Shaftesbury and the British benevolists in the eighteenth century to Max Scheler and others in our own. While this tradition of ethical writing has been almost wholly ignored by post-structuralist theory (one of whose major projects is to deconstruct the nineteenth-century fetishization of reason)<sup>6</sup> in their celebration of "humanity," "sympathy," and the "domestic affections," these eighteenth-century ethics are, arguably, the philosophical tradition closest to mainstream feminist theory and practice. It is thus particularly important that critics approach it with the same analytical tools that in the past have helped to uncover the male-biased logic in the more "totalizing" ethics of reason. My purpose here is to examine the ways in which the ambivalent moral status of women is created through the writing of men, but also, in a related move, to analyze how, through the writing of women, the male-biased system of sympathy is supported, challenged, subverted, or simply revised.

I have already suggested the way in which I believe these strategies work in the examples from More, Ellis, and Gilligan with which this section began. While each writer follows male moralists in representing a gender-specific morality, each differs from them in challenging the ways in

which the roles of women have traditionally been valued. Although the "source" of women's compassionate nature is variously described (as a God-given, culturally necessary, or socially enforced moral role) More, Ellis, and Gilligan are united in their claims that women's compassionate nature should be held in equal or even higher regard than the rational, judgmental, or competitive nature of middle-class men. All three women thus attempt to invert an implicit hierarchy of values in which women's compassion is represented as an inferior moral disposition, the result of her secondary social role.

Finally, the last purpose of this study is to raise a question central to feminist theory and practice: is the effort to build a feminist ethics around some supposedly "feminine" ability to care a politically viable solution to the historical secondariness of women? While such analysis as I propose cannot hope to answer this question, it can insist that the question be addressed. Implicit in this methodology is a resistance to any ethics--whether promoted by men or women--that seeks to normalize domestic arrangements, or, more specifically, to normalize the place of men and women within them. In this I am again in agreement with Foucault, who, toward the end of his life, claimed that the purpose of ethics is not to provide a blueprint of society, but to resist any system that, in theory or in practice, and however radical in its original intent, threatens to become totalizing, or appears to maintain a problematical status quo. I believe this to be the case with the ethics of

sympathy themselves. In the twentieth century, as I have suggested, debates surrounding the nature and value of sympathy are very much alive. In addition to standard texts on sympathy being incorporated into college classes on ethics--e.g., works by scholars Lawrence Blum and Philip Mercer--within the last decade, feminist theory and politics have begun to appropriate various structures of sympathy as viable ethical alternatives to more clearly masculinist ethics, that is, systems based upon appeals to reason or to one or another version of the transcendental self.<sup>7</sup> But are they really alternatives, and does the place of women within them truly indicate what Carol Gilligan would call a "different" and potentially revolutionary voice? Given the relationship between the discourse of sympathy and what I shall argue is its alliance with a male-biased ethico-political system, I am skeptical of this attempt to make sympathy central to a feminist ethical practice.

### **Sympathy and Community**

In order to argue for a "feminine" moral disposition set against the "masculinist" morality of men, one must believe, as I suggested above, that the history of ethics is a history of reason. One must also believe that women's "compassion" is a phenomenon that arises sui generis, or, at least, that is not derived from the same system of masculinist values that it hopes to reform. Only from this relatively purified position can a "feminine" morality serve as the basis of a viable critique. My argument, however, is that masculinist

ethical language is largely responsible for creating the association between women and compassion in the first place, even while it places that association within a hierarchy of value which many women have chosen, by valorizing that role, to legitimize and to defend. Correspondingly, I maintain that ethical language should be seen as one discourse among many through which individuals are endowed with particular mores, manners, and values, all of which will reflect and reinforce the asymmetrical culture from which they are derived.<sup>8</sup>

For the purposes of this argument, a "discourse" may be defined as mode of knowledge production, a principle through which relations are structured or organized: between individuals and institutions, between one group of individuals and another, or between an individual and himself or herself. As Foucault points out, while these relationships will always be cast as a structure of power, the function of a discourse cannot be thematized--it cannot be regarded, for example, as a narrative of some "all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled" (1980, 94). Instead, he claims, a discourse functions as a "series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable" (1980, 100). Foucault's insistence that power relations are dispersed is a significant point for feminist analysis. While it is possible to "read" any discourse in terms of the power relations it seeks to deploy, it is also important to look for the ways in which a discourse creates the conditions for its demise. As Foucault writes, a discourse "transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but it also undermines and

exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (1984, 101). From this point of view, it is not possible to speak of a "dominant" and "dominated" discourse, which might be reflected in some "masculine" or "feminine" morality.<sup>9</sup> The concept of discourse thus suspends, at least temporarily, traditional notions of "patriarchy."<sup>10</sup> At the same time, however, it enables one to examine the complicated power-relations deployed through ethical writing--to examine how those are promoted, sustained, challenged, or displaced, by both women and men.

While the discourse of sympathy has been traced back to the late sixteenth century,<sup>11</sup> in the eighteenth century it begins to assume a peculiarly modern form. As Hans-George Gadamer explains it, Shaftesbury and eighteenth-century philosophers borrowed from the Roman classics the humanist concept of sensus communis, or sympathy (24). While we undoubtedly think of sympathy as signifying an emotion much like compassion, it is best described as an impulse which Shaftesbury presumed to promote. "It is not so much a feature given to all men, a part of the natural law, as a social virtue, a virtue of the heart more than the head" (Gadamer 24). Subsequent ethical writers such as Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith made sympathy central to systematic ethics, to a morality created for an emergent middle class, whose interests were compatible neither with the overtly competitive theories of Hobbes, nor with traditional Christian piety, nor with the "new philosophy" in France, promoted by many British dissenters (Heilbroner 16-39).



Altering the terms of moral discourse, the British benevolists de-emphasized the role of reason and power in social arrangements and promoted, instead, secure relationships between individuals, based upon the ability to sympathize.

Within these broad parameters, one can find any number of slightly different versions of sympathy scattered throughout eighteenth-century writing, each serving to support a particular polemical end: moral, epistemological, metaphysical. In A Treatise of Human Nature, for example, Hume sometimes appeals to the concept of sympathy to counter the Hobbesian notion that the basic principle of society is self-love, to argue, in other words, that men are distinguished from other less "civilized" animals. "In all creatures," he writes, "that prey not upon others . . . there appears a remarkable desire of company, which associates them together, without any advantages they can ever propose to reap from their union" (Treatise 363). He claims that this is most "conspicuous in man . . . who has the most ardent desire of society" (Treatise 363). Alternatively, in Burke's Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757), this mark of civilized man is internalized, so that sympathy more closely resembles an emotion than a social virtue. As such, it can serve as the basis of an affective aesthetics: the "business" of poetry and rhetoric, Burke claims, is to "affect rather by sympathy than imitation; to display rather the effect of things on the mind of the speaker, or of others, than to present a clear

idea of the things themselves" (172). A third and more "metaphysical" version of sympathy appears in Mary Wollstonecraft's letters to Gilbert Imlay. Here Wollstonecraft describes her emotions upon finding herself alone after a difficult evening in a strange land. "What," she asks, "are these imperious sympathies?"

How frequently has [sic] melancholy and even misanthropy taken possession of me, when the world has disgusted me, and friends have proved unkind. I have then considered myself as a particle broken off from the grand mass of mankind;--I was alone, till some involuntary sympathetic emotion, like the attraction of adhesion, made me feel that I was still part of a mighty whole, from which I could not sever myself. (Letters 17)

While these representations are alike in insisting upon the intensely "familial" nature of human beings--the fact that humans are somehow connected--there are subtle differences between them.

These differences suggest that sympathy is an unstable term having no single referent. Given this, sympathy is best read as a kind of literary topos of potential community, where particular versions of the "communal" were in fact being created. Much of this dissertation is devoted to exploring those differences--to examining the contours of community, for example, in the writings of a Tory humanist, an anti-jacobin, and a radical feminist Dissenter. Arguing

from a principle of resemblance, Hume, Burke, Wollstonecraft, and others will represent a community of feeling--a common sense, if you will--as somehow being prior to the social as such. This desire to naturalize sympathy is, of course, a self-legitimizing move. The important point, then, is to analyze how previous versions of sympathy are appropriated, ignored, subverted, or displaced.

My desire to highlight difference and discontinuity in the discourse of sympathy is not merely a critical exercise. Any account of the history of the writing of sympathy must also account for its detractors, for writers who pointed out that women and other groups were excluded from its contours, excluded, that is, from the "family of man." The most famous of these texts is Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. While this novel falls outside the chronological bounds of this study, because Frankenstein is such a familiar text, it can serve as an immediately-recognizable counterpoint to the hopeful visions of sympathy outlined above.

In Frankenstein, sympathy reappears as a key term in portraying social being. This time, however, sympathy is represented as a dangerous desire for a sembable--for another who is just like oneself--that gives rise to a series of disastrous events. Desiring "the company of a man who could sympathize with me" (19), Frankenstein creates a good and benevolent creature whose heart "was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy" (221). Above all else, the monster desires to be accepted by his "fellow-creatures" (120). Patiently, he learns their language, customs, mores,

and even literature. But because he is "endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome" (120) he encounters horror and revulsion from everyone he meets. Outcast, alone, and filled with a sense of injustice, he takes revenge upon the man who made him. "Once," he explains, "my fancy was soothed with dreams of virtue, of fame, of enjoyment. Once I falsely hoped to meet with beings, who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of unfolding" (221). Now, however, having murdered at least some of the people whose esteem he had hoped to enjoy, the monster abandons the search for "fellow-feeling" and is "content to suffer alone" (221).

This gothic novel is thus finally a devastating critique of sympathy, an allegory of a social experiment that failed. For the already marginalized, the completely disempowered, this dream of some pre-existent social bond manifest in the company of generous and benevolent men can but shatter in the face of social reality. In the passages from Burke, Hume, and Wollstonecraft, above, sympathy had been figured as a universal if not natural source of social coherence. In Frankenstein, this figure of "natural" sympathy is revealed to be a twisted dream of resemblance upon which every action in the novel turns. As the monster quickly learns, a common "sensibility"--language, feelings, customs, and mores--does not guarantee one a place in community. "No sympathy," he laments in the end, "may I ever find. When I first sought it, it was the love of virtue, the feelings of happiness and affection with which my whole being overflowed, that I wished

to be participated [sic]. But now, that virtue has become to me a shadow, and that happiness and affection are turned into bitter and loathing despair, in what should I seek for sympathy?" (221). That question is left unanswered, of course, but the clear implication is that the monster can only find company in pain and suffering which he shares, not coincidentally, with Frankenstein\_himself.

Central to this novel, then, are issues that Hume, Burke, and even Wollstonecraft were unable or unwilling to address, issues such as how sympathy is constructed, how it is manifest, and how, given its contours, some people are excluded from "the mighty whole." As David Marshall argues, "Mary Shelley focuses upon the epistemology and the rhetoric of fellow-feeling--which, she shows, raises questions about identification, resemblance, likeness, difference, comparison, and the ability to transport oneself into someone else's thoughts and sentiments" (1988, 198).<sup>12</sup> In this sense Frankenstein locates a blind spot at the heart of eighteenth-century ethics--its failure to tolerate difference--and renders that dramatically in the form of the monster's experience. The monster attributes his exclusion to his inferior social status--to the fact that he has "no money, no friends, no kind of property" (220). This social exclusion, however, is intimately related to his physical appearance, or, more precisely, to the fact that--despite his would-be resemblance to "man"--he is physically different. These issues should not be separated. In early nineteenth-century Britain, his total lack of social status would be as apparent

to others as the "shrivelled complexion and straight black lips" with which the monster has been endowed (57). It is possible to argue, in fact, that it would also be as threatening.

Yet the part of the novel most central to analysis here is that the monster is a prisoner of moral promises denied to him by his birth. He is a being "fashioned" to long for the "esteem" of others. Ironically, however, it is precisely by virtue of his fashioning that he will never enjoy that esteem. This paradox, or conflict, or ethical double bind serves as a kind of thumbnail sketch of the problem of sympathy as I have formulated it--of the complex relationship between ethical writing, the creation of difference, and one's sense of self worth. In order to explore this relationship in more depth, it is necessary to turn away from Shelley's fictional monster to the writing of men, where, as I shall argue, the problematical moral sensibility underwriting Frankenstein is systematically deployed.

### **The Production of Gender**

A fundamental pretext of much feminist analysis is that cultural discourse--including ethical discourse--is intrinsically male-biased. One purpose of such analysis, consequently, is to foreground the extent to which any single cultural formation--philosophy, aesthetics, religion, law, psychology, or sexuality--is practiced in such a way as to create, reinforce, promote, or justify unequal relations of power. Similarly, one purpose here is to discover how the

ethics of sympathy serve to "shape" what is best defined as the "social"--the world of values, morals, relationships, desires, and public roles. Although the term "social" encompasses a myriad of behaviors, desires, qualities, and goals, for the purposes of this dissertation I will focus upon a single one that radiates in many directions, the cultural production of gender.

"Gender" is a complicated issue, but here I shall rely upon Joan Wallach Scott's discussion of the term in Gender and the Politics of History. Any definition of gender, Scott argues, must rest upon an "integral relationship" between two propositions: "Gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relations of power" (42).<sup>13</sup> Given that broad definition, it is also important to understand that both "masculine" and "feminine" traits are organized by a discourse, that both sexes, in other words, are engendered. As one critic puts it, "From the perspective of social relations, men and women are both prisoners of gender, although in highly differentiated but interrelated ways" (Flax 629). The challenge, then, is to account for how women and men internalize the values and mores by which they are both inscribed.

One way to do this is to isolate a source of those values--in this case, ethics--so as to analyze the gender-specific logic of ethical writing itself. At the heart of ethical writing is a host of binaries that, once located, can be used to explicate the intrinsic gender-specific logic of

the discourse as a whole. These binaries appear under various guises--feeling vs. reason, mind vs. body, public vs. private, and weakness vs. strength. Each set, however, will be used to create gendered subjects whose functions, thought, and behaviors will--to a greater or lesser degree--both reflect and reinforce the asymmetrical structures of the society from which they emerge.<sup>14</sup>

What makes the discourse of sympathy such a fascinating subject for critics is that in these ethics, the expected hierarchy of values is obscured, displaced, written into the logic of the text itself, which, moreover, always speaks in the name of "humanity." In order to illustrate--or at least to foreshadow--this hierarchy of values, I would like to return, briefly, to the passage from Hume above (13). Here Hume offers a "general view of human nature" in which humans are represented as members of a benign, even benevolent species, "who has the most desire for company, and is fitted for it by the most advantages" (Treatise 363). This view accords with his earlier description of human nature in Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding, finished in 1736, but not published until 1748. Here, Hume takes it as axiomatic that "the interests of society are not, even on their own account, entirely indifferent to us":

It is needless to push our researches so far as to ask, why we have humanity or fellow-feeling for others. It is sufficient, that this is experienced to be a principle in human nature. We must stop somewhere in our



examination of causes; and there are, in every science, some general principles, beyond which we cannot hope to find any principle more general. No man is entirely indifferent to the happiness and misery of others. The first has a natural tendency to give pleasure; the second, pain. That every one may find in himself. (ECHU 219-20n)

"Humanity," in this account, is a presumably universal impulse to respond in some benign or even favorable way to others. As an a priori principle of human nature, this vision of "humanity" simply serves as a starting point for eighteenth-century ethical writers reacting against Hobbes, for whom all social good is derived from self-love.

Unlike humanity, in this text "sympathy" signifies neither an impulse nor sentiment. It serves, instead, as a principle of communication through which painful or pleasurable emotions might be "transferred" from one person to another. "In general," Hume writes, "it is certain, that, wherever we go, whatever we reflect on or converse about, everything still presents us with the view of human happiness or misery, and excites in our breast a sympathetic movement of pleasure or uneasiness" (ECHU 221). Yet in the eighteenth-century benevolists, the sympathetic imagination was being re-trained, as it were, to identify more readily with a principle of pleasure than with a principle of pain. This passage below, for example, is drawn from Hume's analysis of how sympathy creates "an esteem for power and riches, and a

contempt for meanness and poverty" (Treatise 362):

In general, we may remark, that the minds of men are mirrors to one another, not only because they reflect each other's emotions, but also because those rays of passion, sentiments and opinions may often be reverberated, and decay away by insensible degrees. Thus the pleasure, which a rich man receives from his possessions, being thrown upon the beholder, causes a pleasure and esteem; which sentiments again, being perceiv'd and sympathiz'd with encrease the pleasure of the possessor; and being once more reflected, become a new foundation for pleasure and esteem in the beholder. . . .

(Treatise 365)

This emphasis upon "pleasure and esteem," or the desire to align sympathy with a principle of power, is not only implicit in the examples Hume selects, but in his description of the workings of the sympathetic imagination itself which, he argues "goes easily from the view of a lesser object to that of a greater" (Treatise 357). This form of sympathetic response consistently turns on identification with values thought to be intrinsic to "the good life"--conversation, friendship, "correspondence of feeling"--and away from the pain caused by its deprivation.

Undoubtedly, Hume's relationship between sympathy and pleasure (which will be discussed at length later) seems odd

to many of us; today "sympathy" usually signifies a positive openness to suffering easily equated with an emotion such as compassion or pity. Yet in eighteenth-century writing, "pity" and "compassion" are subject to ongoing revision. Hobbes, for example, had argued that pity signifies a spectator's fear of being cast in the position of the sufferer, and is thus a species of self love.<sup>15</sup> Hume, rather surprisingly, retains this association between compassion and fear, and even represents it as the most "natural" and automatic form of sympathetic response. Since "all human creatures," he writes, "are related to us by resemblance" their "pains and pleasures must strike upon us in a lively manner, and produce an emotion similar to the original one" (Treatise 369). This is particularly true, he continues, of "affliction and sorrow" (Treatise 369). But perhaps because Hume wants to distinguish this reactive and largely self-interested emotion from sympathy with pleasure, a potentially self-empowering social force, he attributes the former to women and children who, because they "are most guided" by the imagination, are "most subject to pity" (Treatise 370). In a sense, compassion is little but "raw" sympathy, a "womanish" hypersensitivity to potential pain. It is not so much a positive concern for the other as it is proof of one's fears of being cast in a similar position. "The same infirmity," he concludes, "which makes them faint at the sight of a naked sword, tho' in the hands of their best friend, makes them pity extremely those, whom they find in any grief or affliction" (Treatise 370).

Humanity, sympathy, and compassion, then, stand in a

complex relation to one another. Humanity signifies the benign nature of man; sympathy, the proof of humanity; and compassion, the automatic response to suffering that, in order to make sympathy the basis of ethical judgment, Hume must explain away. He does this largely by representing compassion, or sympathy with pain, as a feminine trait which, he implies, one should learn to control. By virtue of this distinction, Hume is able to displace compassion--now seen as a feminine form of fear and trembling--from the "normal" (that is, preferable) path of sympathetic response. It is possible to argue that the real issue in the writing of Smith and Hume, then, is not to "prove" the goodness of man, or to promote what we know as "humanitarian" response, but to promote a particular vision of the "good" society from which women, who are also being re-defined, are simultaneously and rather self-consciously cast as "inferior" moral creatures.

Because it promotes a gender-specific account of sympathetic response, Hume's theory of sympathy both reflects and reinforces the doctrine of sexual virtues that characterizes eighteenth-century writing as a whole. In fact, it makes explicit what had been implicit in the doctrine of "separate moral spheres" all along: that because of women's private status, "natural" responses such as compassion and humanity are the only moralities to which women may aspire. Both Hume and Smith, for example, adopt a classical distinction between the "amiable" and the "awful" virtues--the virtues of women and men, respectively--which correlate to the private and public realms. In Smith's account, the

former are "the soft, the gentle, the amiable virtues, the virtues of candid condescension and indulgent humanity" (23). Even though these moral qualities are represented as being pleasant and necessary, they carry connotations of weakness inappropriate for public duty. As Smith writes, "Humanity"

consists merely in the exquisite fellow-feeling which the spectator entertains with the sentiments of the persons principally concerned, so as to grieve for their sufferings, to resent their injuries, and to rejoice at their good fortune. The most humane actions require no self-denial, no self-command, no great exertion of the sense of propriety. They consist only in doing what this exquisite sympathy of its own accord would prompt us to do. (TMS 200)

Woman's "humanity" is set against man's "generosity," an active virtue that requires the ability to represent oneself in some appropriate way--to "exert" a "sense of propriety." Following the logic of this passage, moreover, it is precisely by virtue of their "humanity," their "exquisite sympathy," that women are excluded from the behavior thought to be necessary to the public realm.

In promoting a gender-specific morality, the ethics of sympathy are intimately involved in establishing and naturalizing a cultural division of labor that characterizes early modern society, whereby women are confined to home and motherhood, while men are shaped and molded for some public

role. While that phenomenon, in turn, bears some relation to the exigencies of an emergent economy, to marriage laws, to the middle-class family, and to other issues of social history, I am frankly less interested in exploring such connections than I am in analyzing the politics of sympathy itself, the strategies by which it creates a doctrine of sexual virtues, while promoting and obscuring the hierarchy of values around which the discourse of sympathy is written. Rather than being accidental, this obfuscation is a necessary part of eighteenth-century ethical writing itself. The impact of any ethical writing is dependent upon the proscriptive nature of ethical language as that interacts with concrete political practice. By obscuring the implications of its public/private dichotomy and the gender-specific morality upon which that is based, the discourse of sympathy, I believe, is able to do two things: to promote the presumably "universal" message of "humanitarianism," and to exclude women from the institutions from which so-called humanitarian practice and public power emerge.

### **Sympathy in History**

Any historically-specific account, but particularly a feminist one, is immediately faced with the problem of historiography, or how history is constructed.<sup>16</sup> The reading of sympathy outlined above is, of course, in conflict with traditional accounts of the sympathetic imagination, most of which are themselves male-biased: either women's writing is excluded, or there is no attention to the way women are

represented, or some totalizing construction of history is consistently deployed. The effect of such tactics is to suppress the intensely social and sexual structures at the heart of sympathy, the structures to be explored in this dissertation. Before moving on to that analysis, however, it is helpful to understand why those have not been addressed before. In the following section, I shall discuss the limitations of representative histories by "intellectual," "political," and "social" historians.

From both a feminist and historicist perspective any account of sympathy that argues for a continuous development or gradual evolution in the history of the term is automatically suspicious. We can see the effect of such historiography clearly in the work on sympathy by intellectual historians, where sympathy appears as part of a relatively purified aesthetic and/or philosophical tradition. The classic treatment of sympathy from this point of view is Walter Jackson Bate's, in From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England. In this text Bate serves as an apologist for romantic poetry, as one who would redeem the works of Wordsworth and others from charges of "expansive egocentricity" and "aimless sentimentality" (166). To that end, Bate attempts to expose their relationship to classical aesthetic, philosophical, and moral values. His discussion of sympathy is central to this process.

Focusing upon the relationship of sympathy to radical empiricism, Bate argues that the British benevolists so successfully undermined reason as the basis for moral

judgment (1945, 129), that subsequent writers were forced to rely upon individual feeling as "a means of effective aesthetic and moral insight" (132). Sympathy emerges as the faculty through which this insight is assumed to be conveyed. Yet for Bate, this reliance upon "feeling" as a way of "knowing" the world is a tragic story; it culminates, he argues, in nineteenth-century subjectivism, where "an ego . . . creates and projects its own world, and which has little real hope of knowing anything else" (160). The failure of sympathy--or "individualism" or "feeling"--to provide a stable basis of moral judgment results in the solipsistic poetry of Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley, where the poet, like Keats' nightingale, is doomed to express his own subjectivity or solitude.

Although Bate's account of sympathy as a philosophical problem undoubtedly did much to redeem romantic poets from charges of excessive emotion, in the end it emerges as a barely-veiled critique of the values of "individualism," dramatized through a purified history of sympathetic imagination. To put it another way, Bate reifies one aspect of sympathy--the claim to effect "union" between some subject and object--and casts that as a moral, aesthetic, and epistemological problem related to "individualism" which, in turn, can be judged according to its failure or success. This "history" of sympathy, and the tradition of criticism to which it gave rise,<sup>17</sup> contrasts sharply with a parallel tradition of the writing on sympathy practiced by intellectual historians within less "literary" fields, and,



arguably, by historians of a less conservative stamp.

In more socially-based accounts of the sympathetic imagination, sympathy is allied with benevolism, charity, altruism, or compassion--with any number of impulses which we now associate with the rise of Christian or secular humanism (see Fiering; Acton; and Radner). Norman S. Fiering, for example, associates sympathy with an automatic impulse toward social good--with an "irresistible compassion"--represented in early eighteenth-century ethical writing. He argues that what began as a valorization of charity in the early eighteenth-century--the patho-sympathetic tradition associated with Christianity--gradually became secularized as a principle of social progress in its own right through the ethics of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Smith, and Hume (212). "By mid-eighteenth century, " he writes, "the opinion that a person who is unmoved by the pains and joys of others is a kind of monster, and that God has given men and women inborn feelings of compassion, sympathy, and benevolence as a way of directly guiding mankind to virtue, this opinion became a virtual philosophical and psychological dogma" (205). This emphasis upon compassion, in turn, is thought to play a large part in the establishment of Western humanism. As Fiering continues, "Humanitarianism in this sense is a historical stage in the education of the emotions" (212).<sup>18</sup> Although Fiering admits that this humanitarian ideal was eventually perverted in romanticism, where identification with the sufferer "became an end in itself" (212), his larger view of the telos of sympathy accords with those of political

theorists equally intent upon advocating a vision of humanitarian reform. In the words of another historian, "in insisting that the suffering of others can never be a matter of indifference, Hume and others opened up the road that leads to the demand for equal treatment of equal needs" (Acton 66). In the above constructions of history, sympathy appears as part of a progressive sensibility, coinciding with an egalitarian politics.

It is impossible and even undesirable to attempt to reconcile these two disparate and seemingly contradictory accounts of the sympathetic imagination. It is important to recognize, however, the mutually-repressive function of both. For Bate, sympathy is essentially apolitical; primarily a literary phenomenon, it occurs (or does not occur) in the literary space between some generalized self and other. It is, to repeat, the singular expression of an act of mind signifying the failure of reason as a form of social coherence. For Fiering, in contrast, sympathy is a positive and even involuntary feeling created by and created for a well-meaning society, an "impulse" rather than an act, which has little to do with the "literary" as such. Yet these disparate conclusions are drawn from many of the same texts, and even some of the same passages.

Their disparate conclusions point to different political assumptions. More fundamentally, however, they point to a failure of intellectual history itself. In foregrounding one aspect of sympathy--in separating the "aesthetic" from the "political"--Bate and Fiering are very much the children of

their age, for whom philosophy and politics are (and should be) discrete endeavors. This modern impulse toward territorialization, however, belies the history of British "moral philosophy" itself. Adam Smith, for example, who is often represented as the most influential writer on sympathy (see Bate 1945, 135) was a professor of Moral Philosophy in Glasgow, where, as one critic pointed out long ago, Moral Philosophy "covered Natural Theology, Ethics, Jurisprudence, and Political Economy"--any number of disciplines which we now take to be discrete and even antithetical (Heilbroner 40). "It thus ranged," he continues, "all the way from man's sublimest impulse toward order and harmony to his somewhat less orderly and harmonious activities in the grimmer business of gouging out a living for himself" (Heilbroner 40-41). Both R.H. Brissenden and, more recently, Carol Kay have made the same point (Brissenden 35; Kay 1983; Kay 1986). Arguing that what we now call "political science," "aesthetics," "ethics," and even "women's studies" were once indistinguishable and regarded simply as a part of "moral philosophy," Kay insists that all forms of eighteenth-century writing constitute a single social practice (1986, 66-67). The writing on sympathy, by implication, is self-consciously political, in the broadest sense of that term (Kay 1983, 77-78). To isolate what now seem to be separate traditions so as to write a continuous and unproblematical account is not only to privilege one or another discipline but to expose a peculiarly modern and perhaps masculine fetish for disciplinarity itself.

In its most fundamental aspect, the history of sympathy is part of the history of value, which has always interacted with aesthetics, philosophy, literature and "great history" in complicated ways. What seems to be called for, then, are social-based histories that treat sympathy within a circumscribed historical period, informed by several writing practices. The most interesting accounts of sympathy within this context are by-products of the writing on "sensibility" or "sentimentalism." Both R.H. Brissenden's Virtue in Distress and Janet Todd's Sensibility: An Introduction, for example, have done much to dispel the notion that "sympathy" can be divorced from any number of mutually implicated practices that take place in concrete social settings (Brissenden 31; Todd 1988, 10-31). In each text, "sympathy" is treated as a psychological, physiological, and social phenomenon, loosely allied with benevolist impulses thought to establish and sustain the "good society," where that is variously defined.

However, because these histories of "sensibility" assume such a broad and finally teleological view, they create the rather hazy impression that "sympathy"--as one term in a larger structure of feeling--emerged, flourished, and died. This is undoubtedly due to a meta-historical scheme which Brissenden and Todd employ, although in different ways. Each traces the rise of "sensibility" literature from Richardson's Clarissa in 1759 through its culmination in the Revolutionary era to its demise after the Terror. Brissenden argues that sensibility literature describes an enlightened optimism in

man that "became increasingly more difficult to sustain as the century drew toward its close" (49). Todd differs from Brissenden mostly in her desire to qualify that note of optimism. From its inception, she argues, "sensibility" literature, including the writing on sympathy, was opposed to the "individualistic" values of Britain's dominant and increasingly capitalistic culture (129). Yet it remained sensitive to attacks from the more highly codified and "gentlemanly elite" against which it was defined--it was, she argues, "always on the defensive" (129). This defensiveness, she claims, is expressed "directly through its nostalgic visions of harmonious fellowships and virtuous men and women" (129). And its demise was finally ensured by the rise of conservatism following the French Revolution, and by the subsequent attack on sensibility spearheaded by Godwin, Austen, and others (130).

Recent critics of eighteenth-century writing have begun to turn away from such meta-historical schemes, and to rely, instead, on what might be called "transdiscursive" models, where sympathy is examined in relation to other practices, or modes of representation.<sup>19</sup> David Marshall, for example, has published two books on sympathy as an aesthetic and epistemological problem central to the anti-theatrical tradition. While The Surprising Effects of Sympathy is thus undoubtedly in the tradition of Bate, Marshall consistently gestures toward the fact that for some women sympathy represents a real political problem (181-227). John Mullan's more ambitious book, Sentiment and Sociability, examines the

relationship between the ethics of sympathy, the novel of sentiment, and (following Foucault) eighteenth-century medical practices, all of which, he argues, attempt to create "gendered sensibilities" (81) and thus to engender selves. My own project is distinguished from these in foregrounding the way in which the ethics of sympathy not only created a gender-specific morality, they provided eighteenth-century women with a language in which to respond to it. It also attempts to establish sympathy as an issue that is still central to feminist theory and practice today.

Within ethical writing proper at least, the discourse of sympathy was very much alive throughout the nineteenth century and even into our own. It simply continues to mutate, to assume any number of forms. In the early part of this century, for example, Max Scheler, a student of Husserl and contemporary of Heidegger and Althusser, published The Nature of Sympathy. In what is now regarded as the most systematic and scholarly attempt to institute an ethics based on "feeling" since Hume, Scheler characterizes the problem of sympathy as the "essential, existential, and epistemological foundations of the interconnection between human selves and human souls" (Scheler 213). Scheler's ontologism, about which Heidegger complained (see Heidegger 72-74, 178, 252-53) has since been revised by others, mostly radical and Christian humanists, many of whom are actively publishing today.

Nor was Scheler alone in his preoccupation with sympathetic response. Shortly after Scheler published his monumental phenomenology of sympathy, Virginia Woolf

presented a paper to the Women's Service League in England. In absolute but unwitting contrast to Scheler, she describes sympathy in cultural and historical terms as part of a gender role that women--much to their disadvantage--have simply learned to play. The "Angel in the House," this "intensely sympathetic" woman, is represented as a product of history whose only art "was the difficult art of family life": "she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others" ("Professions" 1385). Consequently, in order to become a professional woman--in order to claim her emotional, intellectual, and economic freedom--Woolf claims that she had to kill the Angel, to catch "her by the throat" (1385). "My excuse," she continues, "if I were to be held up in a court of law, would be that I acted in self-defense. Had I not killed her, she would have killed me" (1385).

These two accounts suggest that the discourse of sympathy is still wending its way through the modernist project, which is, among others things, to represent a stable basis for individual and social progress--to constitute, in short, a stable basis for culture. The fascinating thing about this comparison, however, is that Woolf and Scheler attempt to do so in two apparently contradictory ways. While Scheler desires to "naturalize" sympathy--to represent it as part of the ontology of man through which he may be redeemed--Woolf wants to rescue women from this attempt to naturalize what she believes to be a product of history, or, more precisely, of family life. Read paradigmatically, these two accounts

expose the issues at the heart of sympathy: how its representation of sensus communis, "interconnection," or simply a shared nature, is somehow in conflict with the concrete social positions of middle class women, for whom (according to Woolf, at least) sympathy means exclusion from public life. If, as her comments suggest, the ethics of sympathy and the secondary social position of women are somehow historically implicated, it is imperative that any history of sympathy find a way to represent what was implicit in the discourse all along: that as a cultural discourse, sympathy has implications for men and women that cannot be divorced from concrete structures of social power. It must, in other words, foreground that conflict, rather than promoting what Foucault calls "the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies" (1984, 77) by which the place of women has been denied, suppressed, or obscured. To that end--and with the limitations of the "histories" above in mind--it is possible to lay out a few preliminary guidelines for my own account of sympathy that will follow.

First, in order to represent sympathy adequately, it is necessary to abandon the master narrative and focus, instead, on the struggles and inconsistencies at the heart of the discourse of sympathy itself.<sup>20</sup> At the simplest level, this is a problem of signification.<sup>21</sup> Even on its own terms, the discourse of sympathy is volatile, unstable, and double-edged, changing across disciplines and through time. Given that sympathy constitutes a discursive field through which



several modes of sympathetic response were actively being contested, it makes little sense to assume, with intellectual historians, that it is possible to unearth a "dominant" mode of feeling, thought to characterize an age. Even the two brief examples drawn from Woolf and Scheler illustrate the futility of this enterprise. For Scheler, sympathy is a positive mode of knowing, while for Woolf, the same word signifies a learned emotion, a responsiveness on the part of women that has played a central role in their secondariness. Any attempt, then, to isolate a characteristic "structure of feeling"--to borrow a term from Raymond Williams--is, however qualified, a hopelessly idealist enterprise (Williams 1977, 128-141).

Second, in the same way that it is necessary to abandon the idea of history as an unbroken telos of "dominant" feeling, it is necessary to decenter the texts through which intellectual history supports its conclusions. As I have suggested, the history of sensibility is thought to be best conveyed from the work of Shaftesbury (in philosophy) and Richardson (in fiction), through the works of the British romantic poets. This androcentric approach is misleading. Obviously, no society is so homogeneous, no tradition so intact, that the moral sensibility reflected or promoted in any single or multiple of canonized texts can truly be regarded as representative. Such spokespersons of "high culture," moreover, are not typically characteristic of any age, much less of their own. Most importantly, in assuming that male writers are the legitimate bearers of moral

coherence, critics simply buy into the universalistic claims of literature--that, in the words of Shelley, male poets (and presumably, philosophers)--are the "moral legislators of the world."

Third, it is necessary to disabuse ourselves of the notion that morality is prior to other social structures, as Shelley would have us believe. Moral language, including the language of sympathy, is axiological language. This means that, despite its frequent claims to transcendence and universal applicability, it is always involved in the self-conscious writing of value. This aspect of moral discourse in the eighteenth century has been explored most systematically by John Mullan, who argues that philosophical texts and cheap novels are together involved in creating normative social models. "Neither type of text," he argues, "simply reflects social conditions or relations: both produce society; both seek to make society on the page" (25).

Given that this society is inevitably asymmetrical--one, for example, where women are valued differently from men--we can expect that "difference" and others to be manifest in the language and structures of morality itself. The "problem" of sympathy, from this point of view, is not simply a matter of historical reconstruction, but of how, at least through the early modern period, the discourse of sympathy has functioned to construct embodied selves--to regulate emotional structures and concrete ways of social interaction. It is to represent how the discourse of sympathy is intrinsically and self-consciously political, in immediate if sometimes evasive

ways. From this point of view, the history of sympathy is not the history of a sentiment or the history of a sensibility. It is instead a history of exclusion, a story of gaps and ruptures in its representations of community. Though there is no way to trace the "evolution" of sympathy within this dense and ongoing field of contention, it is possible, as Foucault suggests, to "isolate the different scenes" where sympathy engages "in different roles" (1984, 76).

### Overview

In the body of this study, I shall be working upon a circumscribed time period, extending roughly from the publication of Hume's A Treatise of Human Nature in 1739-40 to the close of the eighteenth century. Given that my project spans a particular number of years, this dissertation makes some pretense to being a history of sympathy, but only in a very narrow sense of that term--only insofar as "history" can be represented through the literary, which is itself an attempt to re-construct and re-form it. In order to provide the most varied field of reading possible, I will be focusing upon paradigmatic examples or "scenes" of sympathetic response in mid-eighteenth-century texts by a number of writers--David Hume, Adam Smith, Edmund Burke, Dorothy and William Wordsworth, J.J. Rousseau, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, Hannah More--that span several genres: aesthetics, ethics, political treatises, the novel, travel literature, and poetry.

From Hume to Rousseau, the idea that women possess a

natural humanity is being institutionalized through a literature whose determination is to promote a superior form of morality in men. By attending to what are deemed "representative" structures of sympathetic response, I hope, first, simply to make this once-pervasive and even formative discourse visible again. To that end, I shall examine in Part One what I take to be the two most widespread paradigms of sympathetic response promoted in the writings of men. Chapter One contains an analysis of Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments. In that book, and despite its pretensions to universalism, sympathy promotes a cultural hegemony from which the feminine is excluded. Its major project is to ensure "fellow-feeling" for every upwardly-mobile man, or to promote an economy from which women are displaced. Men are encouraged, through appropriate self-representation, to identify with a principle of pleasure and power, and women, to identify with the suffering of disempowered others whose situation more nearly approximates their own.

This tension between "masculine" and "feminine" forms of sympathetic response is underwritten by an economy of pleasure and pain also apparent in eighteenth-century aesthetics. In the chapter that follows I demonstrate the close relationship between ethics and aesthetics by examining the gender-specific subtext of William Wordsworth's "sympathetic sublime," where sympathy is pressed in the service of aesthetic and "literary" goals. This observation opens up an issue central to literary criticism. Several critics have noted the absence of the sublime moment in the

writing of William's sister Dorothy. While this absence has sometimes been attributed to a thwarted imagination or some "feminine" moral disposition, I argue, in contrast, that Dorothy Wordsworth's representation of the sympathetic imagination constitutes a partial challenge to the male-biased ethico-aesthetic system of William.

Together, the discussions of Smith and Wordsworth point to an issue that is central to the second half of this study: the way women writers appropriated a male-biased discourse to represent the "feminine" in more concrete and socially-empowering ways than the male moralists had allowed. The first generation of "liberal" feminist writing, represented here by Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More, was forced to contend not only with an ethics and aesthetics that promote different moralities for men and women but, more significantly, with a hierarchy of values in which those moralities are cast--with the way that gender-based relations of power were somehow represented not only as "natural," but "preferable," or "good." In Chapter Three, I demonstrate that Wollstonecraft's purpose is to endow moral women with moral "autonomy," in part by reforming "compassion" and revising the structure of the impartial spectator, outlined by Smith. Yet Wollstonecraft shares with Smith, Hume, and even Rousseau a belief in the primacy of the "domestic affections," or in the role that the family plays in ensuring the stability and progress of the state. Correspondingly, she does not challenge the public/private dichotomy with which women's compassion had been allied. Instead, in an attempt to re-

value the private role of women, she insists that the "good society" is founded upon "mutual sympathy" between a mother and her child. In effect, Wollstonecraft displaces the doctrine of sexual virtues at the level of moral judgment, only to replace it at the level of moral function.

In her partial challenge to the doctrine of sexual virtues, however, Wollstonecraft differs from Hannah More, the subject of Chapter Four. This presumably conservative and, according to modern accounts, anti-feminist writer claims with Smith and Rousseau that men and women are endowed with different moral dispositions. Given her Christian assumptions about the degraded nature of the public world, however, this claim enables More to elevate the moral status of women, to insist that they enjoy a valuable and even superior moral role to that of men, so long as the difference between them is maintained. Yet More's distrust of "mutual sympathy" and her elevation of compassion is not only related to her feminist politics, but to her desire to endow the roles of women with moral value. As I shall illustrate throughout this chapter, this largely compensatory gesture is directly related to conservative political practices whereby the compassionate qualities of women serve the greater interests of middle class men, that is, to suppress dissatisfaction in the increasingly restless laboring poor. By making the relationship between sympathy, feminism, and party politics explicit, I hope to cast light not only upon the discourse of sympathy in early feminist writing, but upon its relationship to contemporary feminist theory and

practice, where sympathy is perhaps too quickly regarded as a radical and unifying force, while its historical place in a relatively conservative middle-class political agenda is too easily obscured.

These disparate approaches to sympathy should serve to place this presumably "positive" feminine trait within a broader historical context. Since the eighteenth century, I maintain, sympathy has been allied with various humanitarianism impulses and pleas for social reform, from both the right and the left. It also appears as a trope in aesthetic writing, which would appear to promote no politics at all. Yet it is possible to argue that in each of these contexts, the discourse of sympathy itself functions as a bifurcated program of social control. Whether one agrees with the specifics of this argument or not, it is imperative, I believe, that the previous successes and failures of sympathy be subject to the same kind of scrupulous analysis that feminism has brought to the discourse of reason. The fact that this protean topos of sympathy, which appears in virtually every form and every period of eighteenth-century writing, is so familiar to us that it is only now receiving some modicum of critical attention, perhaps indicates the success of a humanist project systematized by this diverse group of eighteenth-century writers. It also, however, indicates a need for analyzing sympathy more carefully--for asking, again, with Mary Wollstonecraft, "what are these imperious sympathies?" What are their contours? How are they effected? And, finally, to what extent have they changed?

### Notes to Introduction

1. While everyone agrees that with the rise of a market economy eighteenth-century women and men began to perform different social roles, the precise nature of the public/private dichotomy alluded to here is subject to ongoing debate. For a useful analysis of this problem, see Zaretsky, who argues that until the nineteenth century "while there was an intense division of labour within the family, there was scarcely a division between the family and the world of commodity production" (29). The classic treatment of the public/private dichotomy from a feminist point of view is Rosaldo 1974, but also Rosaldo 1980, which is a critique of the earlier article. See also Jaggar, who discusses the public/private dichotomy in relation to both political and feminist theory, and Scott (15-50), who offers an excellent overview of the problem.

2. See, for example, Raymond Williams' argument in The Country and the City (1973); Janet Todd's recapitulation of it in Sensibility: An Introduction (1986); and Judith Newton's response in "Making--and Re-making--History: Another Look at Patriarchy" (1987).

3. While this division, as Alice Browne has noted, is intrinsic to the history of feminism itself, the most recent example of this tension is the relationship between liberal and radical feminism. See Eisenstein.

4. I share this assumption with Michel Foucault, who, toward the end of his life, began writing a genealogy of ethics. Foucault consistently maintained that while it is impossible to locate an "analytical" or "necessary" relationship between ethics and "the great political and social and economic structures," it is possible to write "a historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents" (1984, 350). My project is in that spirit. Other accounts of the relationship between ethics and politics include Foucault 1988, 373-390. One of the best discussions of Foucault's relationship to ethics is Davidson's.

5. Nussbaum comments upon a similar ambivalence in her discussion of Pope's poem (137-58). For other discussions, see Ehrenpreis; and Spacks 1971 and 1976.

6. While this preoccupation with the history of reason is a mark of post-structuralist critiques, it is particularly apparent in feminist ethical writing, where reason is often identified as the single greatest myth of a masculinist philosophy. Among psychoanalytic writers, Dorothy Dinnerstein was influential, although Chodorow and Gilligan have more contemporary followers. One would also have to include Irigaray, Kristeva, and Clément and Cixous in this list.



7. In moral philosophy, as Kathryn Pauley Morgan predicted, there are no such "stars" (161) as we find in feminist theory, but Lloyd's book (1984) is foundational. Recently, a fine collection of essays has been devoted to the problem of an "alternative" ethics. See Kittay and Meyers, especially the essays by Baier, Held, Friedman, Ruddick (1987), and Katzenstein and Laitin.

8. Ideally, a discursive analysis enables one to focus upon the differences within a system of what must be regarded as cultural codes without either thematizing them or attributing such changes to an individual. To read something as a discourse it is necessary to de-emphasize the speaking subject, or, in the words of Foucault, to obscure the one who speaks in order to focus upon the "things said" (1972, 239).

9. Foucault is very clear about this. "There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy" (1980, 102). While it may be possible to speak of "reverse discourses" in which feminists and other groups appropriate the practices by which they are inscribed, and turn it to their own ends, I do not consider this to be a possibility with ethical discourse, since, by its very nature, it operates through binaries which can be reversed without ever being displaced. For an opposing point of view, see Kathleen Jones.

10. It should be said, in passing, that a discursive analysis, from some points of view, is in conflict with the feminist assumptions outlined above. It has been argued, for example, that in treating subjects and subjectivity as gender-neutral terms, a discursive analysis undermines the feminist project to recover a history from which women as subjects have already been excluded. This objection often emanates from "her-story" or psychoanalytic critics who would preserve, in one way or another, the primacy of the engendered subject over discursive formations themselves (see, for example, Balbus 1987). In response to this objection, I would point out that even in Foucault, the subject is not dissolved into an interplay of anonymous discursive practices; instead, she or he is concretely situated within a discursive space which enables meaning within particular bounds. To put it another way, in opposition to the idea of a sovereign subject who stands outside of linguistic codes, and who would "deposit in the discourse the indelible traces of his liberty," Foucault posits an author-function whose role and operations, as they are exercised by different "discoursing" subjects, might be studied (1972, 236). No writer, then, can be said to originate meaning, but every piece of writing enables it, in more or less immediate ways. Discursive analysis is therefore

no more or less intrinsically male-biased than any other historical methodology. For discussions of the relationship between feminism and Foucault, see Weedon 107-135; Diamond and Quinby ix-xx; Lydon 135-147. In relation to the problem of the writing subject, see Nancy K. Miller for an alternative point of view.

11. See Foucault 1973 (17-25), where he argues that convenientia, aemulatio, analogy, and sympathy constitute an episteme, a way of ordering knowledge, based upon a series of resemblances.

12. The absence of a central female character in a novel about a man and his hideous progeny has given rise to any number of interesting feminist interpretations, as well. Anne K. Mellor, for example, argues quite convincingly that Shelley's novel exemplifies the failure of a masculinist morality that "rapes" Nature, only to discover that Nature, which is feminine, always takes her revenge. "Frankenstein," she concludes, "should have better balanced the obligations of great and small, of parent and child, of creator and created" (230). This interpretation, derived from Gilligan's study of feminine moral development, stands in an interesting conjunction with the argument here.

13. Other of Scott's distinctions are equally useful. As a constitutive, or formative, element of social relationships that is dependent upon (shifting) representations of sexual difference, gender involves four "interrelated elements": 1) culturally available symbols perpetuated by religion or meta-ethical systems, such as Eve and Mary in Western Christianity; 2) "normative" concepts that "set forth interpretations of the meaning of the symbols, that attempt to limit and contain their metaphoric possibilities" in religious, legal, scientific, and political doctrine; 3) the relationship of both the symbols and their meanings to social institutions and organizations--to the "political" in the broadest sense of that word; and 4) how the preceding relationships contribute to subjective identity (43-44).

14. According to Scott, this is the nature of binary logic, which normative concepts necessarily promote. They "typically take the form of a fixed binary opposition, categorically and unequivocally asserting the meaning of male and female, masculine and feminine. In fact, these normative statements depend on the refusal or repression of alternative possibilities, and sometimes overt contests about them take place....The position that emerges as dominant, however, is stated as the only possible one" (43).

15. See Fiering 198. Hume retains Hobbes's idea that the emotion of pity has reference to self-preservation, and is thus a species of self-love emanating from personal fear. Creating a "fiction of future calamity to ourselves," Hobbes had claimed, and provoked by the misfortune of another, we respond with "pity."

16. Feminist approaches to history are myriad and sometimes in conflict with one another. In literary criticism, they range from reconstructive histories (her-story) and gender studies to theoretically-grounded critiques. For discussions of the relationship between feminism or women and history, see Newton and Rosenfelt, xv-xxxiv; Fraser and Nicholson; Scott 1-50; Smith-Rosenberg; and Allen. Unlike most feminist critics, Allen in fact argues that the "professional discipline of history is axiomatically phallogocentric" in ways that are not "amenable to some simple reform of content or approach" (187).

17. This ahistorical view of sympathy has done much, of course, to create and then reify a myth of romanticism that more recent criticism of the period defines itself against. M.H. Abrams, for example, reinforces many of Bate's arguments in The Mirror and the Lamp (245, 247, 332), where sympathy is represented as a hopeful (but deluded) attempt to create a bridge between self and other, self and nature. This focus upon some subject/object relationship is further exemplified in the work of Bloom, Hartman, and De Man, all of whom are within a hermeneutic tradition that is implicated in the rise of sympathy as a mode of knowledge. This work contrasts sharply with those romantic critics who insist that romantic poetry is intrinsically social. See, for example, McGann.

18. At least one article has been devoted to challenging Fiering's thesis that sympathy is unmediated. John Radner, who traces the writing of sympathy from Hutcheson to Dugald Stewart, argues convincingly that in most accounts, sympathy must be regarded as a deliberate mental exercise rather than as an automatic force for social good.

19. Within the past three years, both mainstream literary criticism and feminist criticism have shown a renewed interest in the problem of sympathy. The major books in the first category are Marshall 1986; Marshall 1988; and Mullan 1988. The writer whose treatment is of sympathy is closest to my own, however, is Carol Kay, whose articles are repeatedly cited throughout the text.

20. Here, I am dependent upon Foucault's notion of genealogy for my analysis of sympathy. In case it is still necessary to provide a summary of "genealogy" here goes. Any analysis, claims Foucault, is necessarily contingent and radically incomplete. It is no longer possible, to assume that words have "kept their meaning," or that desires still point "in a single direction," or that ideas retain their logic. (1984, 76). The genealogist recognizes, instead, that the "world of speech and desires has known invasions, struggles, plunderings, disguises, ploys" (1984, 76). From this point of view, history is not only discontinuous and evasive, but in a more immediate sense, the product of struggle and contention among and within particular discursive practices: ethics, aesthetics, psychology, legal codes, etc. Because it is impossible to discover all such practices--much less the

logic by which they are governed--it is necessary, Foucault continues, to "record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality," to seek the events which constitute history "in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history--in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts"--not in order to "trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles" (1984, 76).

21. T.D. Campbell points out that the equation between sympathy and an emotion was promoted by A. L. Macfie in The Individual and Society (95n). Within philosophy, most scholars now assume with Campbell that "sympathy is not itself a sentiment and it is certainly not to be equated with benevolence or pity" (95), although there is some disagreement about what it is, or whether or not the concept signifies the same thing in Hume and Smith. John Jenkins and Glen Morrow argue that sympathy in both cases is essentially a principle of communication, by which one person's emotions are transferred to another. Campbell agrees with this description in the case of Hume, but claims that Smith's account of sympathy is closer to Hutcheson's concept of "public sense," in which sympathy serves as a standard of judgment (95). In order to avoid this debate as much as possible and still be fair to the distinctions between Smith and Hume, I have found it useful to analyze the various structures of sympathy according to whether they promote identification with pleasure, or identification with pain.

## Part One: Ethics and Aesthetics

'Tis woven in the world's great plan,  
And fixed by Heaven's decree,  
That all the true delights of man  
Should spring from Sympathy....

Cowper, "Lines Addressed to Miss  
on Reading 'The Prayer for  
Indifference'

## Chapter I: The Logic of Sympathy

To insist that sympathy has a history--much less such a concretely political one--may, admittedly, seem to be counter-intuitive. As literary critics, we tend to think of sympathy in one of two ways: immediately, as having reference to an emotion promoted by sentimental literature--by scenes of "virtue" in "distress"--or more generally, perhaps, as an important term in the patho-sympathetic tradition derived from Aristotle and perpetuated by modern aesthetics as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Yet as a part of ethical discourse, value terms--even such "friendly" ones as sympathy--are intimately involved in the creation of social relationships that, throughout history, have elevated the moral status and power of men at the expense of their women counterparts. Why, then, have Hume, Smith, Hutcheson and others not been subjected to a thoroughgoing feminist critique?

One explanation is that, unlike many philosophies, those of the British moralists have traditionally been associated with "feeling" as distinct from "reason," in part because feminist philosophers such as Genevieve Lloyd have set the precedent for equating a tradition of philosophical writing dependent upon "reason" with woman's secondariness in the moral and political realms. From this point of view, the theories of the British moralists appear, at first glance, to be less "totalizing" than those of Kant, Hegel, and others

who still serve as the bastions of a masculinist intellectual culture.<sup>2</sup> As one critic has commented à propos of Hume's theory of judgment, its "most striking feature" is the "reduced role assigned in it to reason" (Miller 24). Yet at the level of moral judgment, the difference between an ethics of reason and the ethics of sympathy is not in fact so pronounced as many feminist analyses assume. Although reason is displaced as the basis of moral judgment, for example, its proscriptive function--to promote a society of reasonable and virtuous men--is retained in the impartial spectator, who, according to Smith, simply replaces the "casuistic rules" of conduct (TMS 227). This point requires no deep reading or subtextual analysis. As David Marshall has explained the impartial spectator, "He (and he is clearly masculine) is alternatively characterized as an ideal observer, an ordinary bystander, the voice of the people, an omniscient deity, the normative values of society, a relativistic social code, absolute standards, the personification of conscience, the internalization of social repression, the superego, and simply a hypothetical, abstract third person" (1986, 167). In each case, the ethics of sympathy promote a set of public norms with which, it is apparent, only men can identify.

A second and related explanation for this omission, then, is that the reason/feeling binary upon which so many feminist analyses depend is an unreliable method for discussing the biases of eighteenth-century ethical writing. In short, the binary outlined by Lloyd and appropriated by Gilligan and others does not always hold. It is increasingly apparent, for

example, that the ethics of sympathy proper, even though they cannot be categorized with the tradition of reason, are only peripherally related to "feeling" as such. As John J. Jenkins has argued of Hume, "sympathy" is "essentially Hume's account of how a sentiment or an emotion is, under certain conditions, transferred from one person to another":

It is therefore not itself the name of a sentiment. Our temptation to think of it as such is a strong one because we now associate it with pity or compassion. But, for Hume, sympathy is the means by which pity and compassion, among other sentiments, may be communicated, and hence must be distinguished from them. (91)

"To sympathize with others," then, is not to feel a particular emotion for them. It is, instead, either to project one's feeling upon an (equally sympathetic) audience, or to receive by communication the inclinations and sentiments of others. In this sense, sympathy is an act of imagination, a philosophical fiction by which one imagines himself or herself in the situation of another, or the principle by which another's responses affect one's own. "As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel," Smith writes,

we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation....By the imagination we place



ourselves in his situation...we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some ideas of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. (TMS 10)

As an act of imagination, sympathy is implicated in both reason and feeling, even though it is reducible to neither. It is by virtue of this intermediate position that some modern ethical texts, as I shall discuss later, are still devoted to arguing whether or not an ethics of sympathy is "viable."

Rather than aligning myself with either an ethics of feeling or reason, then, I will attempt to treat the ethics of sympathy--as other feminist critics have treated reason--as an intrinsically male-biased mode of inscription. My argument is that the relative merits of any single "moral faculty" is less important than the fact that all ethical discourse, despite its pretensions to universality, will necessarily reflect and reinforce the values of a male-biased culture--as the masculinist nature of the impartial spectator attests. In this chapter, however, I will examine a second way in which the ethics of sympathy, as those involve a presumable universal act of the imagination, are intrinsically male-biased. The ethics of sympathy, as I have suggested, are underwritten by an economy of pleasure and pain, through which both Hume and Smith attempt to inscribe what they regard as "appropriate" ethical response.

Significantly, this response differs for men and women. While men are encouraged to repress or displace pain and to identify with a principle of pleasure, women are represented as embodying a "natural" response to the suffering of others. In effect, then, this "feminine" form of sympathetic response is what the ethics of sympathy are written against--it is what, through practicing the ethic of "self-command," men are told they should overcome. Before drawing conclusions about what this gender-specific morality "means," however, one should place in it a larger cultural context; one should examine the parallels between eighteenth-century theories of sympathy and eighteenth-century aesthetic writing, which, by virtue of the sympathetic imagination, similarly appeals to a principle of pleasure in the attempt to create "correspondence of feeling" among already-similar men. From this point of view, sympathy appears not simply as a reaction against some "feminine" morality, but as a necessary part of a larger middle-class ethico-political vision through which that association between women and compassion is both devalued and reinforced. This has less to do with the "real" moral dispositions of eighteenth-century women, than it has to do with the exigencies of ethical writing itself, which must always operate by creating hierarchies of value.

In making this argument, I shall focus upon Hume's Treatise on Human Nature and Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments. While these texts differ on many points, my intention is not to explicate them, or to duplicate their own intrinsic logic. It is, instead, to examine through a series

of paradigmatic readings significant points at which they not only intersect with each other, but with other discourses, such as politics and aesthetics. This amounts to reading three distinct but interrelated "moments" in the texts. First, by examining the relationship between ethical and aesthetic discourse, I shall foreground the implicit relationship between sympathy and an ethics of reason, where one's measure of sympathy (and thus one's measure of humanity) is inextricably bound to the desire to represent oneself in such a way as to conform to established social norms, embodied in and inscribed by the impartial spectator. Second, I shall discuss how in this new role--as a self-regulating principle of communication--sympathy not only replaces reason as the basis of ethical judgment; it encourages men to identify with a principle of pleasure and power, from which women, by virtue of the gender-specific subtext of sympathy itself, are excluded. This exclusion, moreover, is guaranteed through the "state of nature" metaphor that holds up friendship between virtuous men as the ne plus ultra of sympathetic response. Consequently, the last section of this chapter is devoted to discussing what this masculinist economy means.

### Correspondence of Feeling

What complicates any analysis of sympathy is that the discourse is constantly in flux. Even a brief survey of the eighteenth-century literature reveals that the writers exploring sympathy were simultaneously inscribing various and

often contradictory versions of "appropriate" sympathetic response, some of which emphasize the importance of "pity" and "compassion" in creating the "good society"--or, at least, in creating the better man. Generally speaking, however, in the ethics of Hume and Smith, while sympathy still serves as the vehicle of social progress, its function and telos are more closely allied to contemporary aesthetic than contemporary Christian doctrine.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the most familiar account of sympathetic response, for example, is Hume's "mind of man as mirror" metaphor, drawn from the Treatise. Because of its importance, I, for the second time, quote from it at length:

In general, we may remark, that the minds of men are mirrors to one another, not only because they reflect each other's emotions, but also because those rays of passion, sentiments and opinions may often be reverberated, and decay away by insensible degrees. Thus the pleasure, which a rich man receives from his possessions, being thrown upon the beholder, causes a pleasure and esteem; which sentiments again, being perceiv'd and sympathiz'd with encrease the pleasure of the possessor; and being once more reflected, become a new foundation for pleasure and esteem in the beholder. . . .

(Treatise 414)

The first thing one notices here is the mutuality of sympathetic response, whereby sentiments are "reverberated"

between the spectator, the object of perception, and then back to the spectator, until they "decay away by sensible degrees." This emphasis upon mutuality and relationship is the hallmark of the discourse of sympathy, and the basis of its largely specular structure. The second thing one notices, however, is the way in which this specular structure is underwritten by pleasure or "esteem," so that this version of sympathetic response is sharply distinguished from theories of benevolism and compassion. Together, these two aspects of sympathetic response point to something new and peculiarly "romantic" about the discourse of sympathy, i.e. that it shares the tendency of eighteenth-century aesthetics to create social bonds by appealing to principles of "pleasure" with which, Hume seems to imply, all human beings may "sympathize."

In erecting a social model based on pleasure, Hume and Smith are most convincingly reflective of their place and time. In the mid-eighteenth century, as Colin Mercer has noted, pleasure came to function as a "sort of social grammar" (88-89). Through various economies of the emotions--through a kind of cost/benefit analyses of pleasure and pain--"utilitarian" writers from Shaftesbury to Malthus to Shelley sought to regulate the emotions of distinct groups and classes, to organize them in the interests of "greater society." Within this context, both ethics and aesthetics have a political function. The purpose of ethics is to encourage appropriate behavior; the purpose of aesthetics is to encourage the refinement of perception upon which behavior

might eventually be based. Given the mutually-reinforcing relationship between ethics and aesthetics, each discourse not only appeals to the other, but both appeal to some larger normative notion of "the good life" underwritten by the desire for pleasure, and the corresponding desire to avoid pain. Any analysis of sympathy, then, must answer this question: who, or what, is being organized by sympathy, and how does that organization contribute (in theory at least) to the utilitarian ideal--"the greatest happiness for the greatest number"? Yet this is not easy to do. Precisely because ethics and aesthetics are so closely allied, the normative impulses behind the ethics of sympathy are easily obscured.

Like eighteenth-century aesthetic writing, the discourse of sympathy is aligned with metaphors drawn from the world of natural forces, popular events, and concrete objects, through which, one could argue, each seeks to "ground" itself as a natural function. Writers who wish to establish sympathy as a universal intuition, for example, often draw upon Newtonian physics or recent discoveries in electromagnetics to suggest that there is an analogy between such natural physical processes and the seemingly natural workings of the mind. Thus in his explanation of sympathy, Alexander Gerard writes that "As the magnet selects from a quantity of matter the ferruginous particles, which happen to be scattered through it...so imagination, by a similar sympathy, equally inexplicable, draws out from the whole compass of nature such ideas as we have occasion for, without attending to any

others" (173-74). Other writers of sympathy, as David Marshall has illustrated, depend upon the ancient tradition of theatrum mundi to explain the nature and function of sympathetic response, in which everyone serves as spectacle and spectator (1986, 168). And yet others draw upon an equation between the workings of the imagination and the "sympathetic system," or the way in which different bodily organs were thought to communicate with other (Mullan 228-29). However these figures differ from another, each functions to explain, promote, or encourage relations between people by appealing to some more familiar and concrete principle outside the relationship itself.

Hume and Smith share this desire, but unlike many of the writers above, rather than simply "proving" sympathy, they want to cultivate particular social relationships, to direct sympathy in certain ways. For this reason, while they often rely upon many of the metaphors above, both Hume and Smith appeal to the ancient ideal of social harmony, manifest in the correspondence of minds.<sup>4</sup> Hume likens the mind of man to "strings equally wound up," which "communicate" their vibrations to each other (Treatise 576) thereby asserting the universal nature of sympathetic response, but also appealing to a notion of regularity through which such a universal process may be disciplined, regulated, or controlled. The same can be said of Smith, who claims that the great pleasure of conversation and society "arises from a certain correspondence of sentiments and opinion, from a certain harmony of minds, which like so many musical instruments

coincide and keep time with one another" (TMS 337). The musical metaphors point to an ideal which certain forms of sympathetic response are thought to promote.

This gesture toward universal harmony, should not, however, obscure the extent to which mutual sympathy is represented in each text as something of a rare phenomenon, one dependent, in fact, upon similar experiences, values, goals--and even (despite the musical metaphor) upon a shared language itself. To borrow a phrase from Paul De Man, the structure of sympathy is strictly temporal.<sup>5</sup> In the Treatise of Human Nature, for example, Hume represents sympathy as a universal potential, not as fait accompli: "No quality of human nature," he writes, "is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own" (Treatise 316). This propensity to respond "naturally" to the emotions of "others," however, is clearly meant to sustain a kind of cultural homogeneity. Consequently, Hume's account of sympathy is soon qualified. Despite this "general resemblance of our natures," Hume writes, any similarity of manners, character, country, or language, "facilitates sympathy" (Treatise, 316). Similarly, in the Theory of Moral Sentiments, sympathy is even more closely associated with a shared language and mutual adherence to some pre-existent social authority. Following Hume, Smith argues that while the possibility of sympathy derives from the assumption that human beings share the



"seeds and first principles" of all emotions, its actuality is dependent upon the familiarity of a particular emotion and upon its effective representation. "General lamentations," he writes, can create some vague "curiosity" along with the "disposition to sympathize," but they cannot provoke any "actual sympathy that is very sensible" (TMS 11). Moreover, in a kind of back-handed qualification of "universal" sympathetic response, Smith claims the following: while "we enter more readily into the sentiments, which resemble those we feel everyday, no passion, when well-represented, can be entirely indifferent to us" [emphasis added] (TMS 22).

The possibility of "correspondence of feeling" turns upon effective self-representation. This self-representation, in turn, must be regarded as "appropriate," or in conformity with pre-established social and cultural norms. One must be able to modulate his emotions so that they will conform to-- "harmonize with"--the emotions of others around him. As Smith writes of the character who suffers:

He longs for that relief which nothing can afford him but the entire concord of the affections of spectators with his own. To see the emotions of their hearts, in every respect, beat time to his own, in the violent and disagreeable passions, constitutes his sole consolation. But he can only hope to obtain this by lowering his passion to that pitch, in which the spectators are capable of going along with him. He must flatten . . .

the sharpness of his natural tone, in order  
to reduce it to harmony and concord with the  
emotions of those who are about him. (TMS 22)

In effect, Smith's sympathetic individual "tunes" and "re-plays" his emotions until they are harmony with those of the people who are watching him. By making "fellow-feeling" dependent upon a shared culture or a common language--even upon a well-constructed narrative of the emotions--Smith, like Hume, implies that sympathy involves a calculated act of self-representation that--like language, one assumes--itself reflects the values and norms of a previously-shared culture.

Because sympathy functions as a self-regulating principle of appropriate emotional response, it is able to replace reason as the foundation of moral judgment. In essence, the individual, by virtue of the ability to sympathize, is simultaneously made the embodiment of culturally-inherited notions of right and wrong. In Part VII of his Theory of Moral Sentiments, for example, Smith argues against Cudworth and other moralists that while "reason is undoubtedly the source of the general rules of morality . . . it is altogether absurd and unintelligible to suppose that the first perceptions of right and wrong can be derived from reason" (TMS 320). Instead, he argues that these first impressions are derived from "sense and feeling," from the comparative pleasure or pain with which one views the actions and emotions of others. In this sense, society--or, more precisely, the people within it--provides a "mirror" of one's character, insofar as "social man" will respond approvingly

or disapprovingly to the men or women around him:

[Society] is placed in the countenance and behavior of those he lives with, which always mark when they enter into, and when they disapprove of his sentiments; and it is here that he first views the propriety and impropriety of his own passions, the beauty and deformity of his own mind. (TMS 110)

In other words, society provides the opportunity for "self-reflection" (TMS 111-112) that sympathy, as a self-regulating vehicle of social judgment, will exercise and maintain.

Sympathy is dependent upon a concentrated act of self-representation in a society that will "mirror" one's actions and demeanor with approval or disapproval. As the above passages suggest, Hume and Smith rely heavily upon visual and aural metaphors in describing the normative aspect of sympathetic response. Their reliance upon metaphors drawn from an expressivist aesthetics, however, creates a problem in the realm of moral judgment, since according to that logic, an appropriate member of society must always be present for moral judgment to occur--in order for one to "view . . . the beauty or deformity of [his] own mind" (TMS 110). The British moralists simply elide this problem by raising the specular structure of sympathy to a higher level. Both appeal to a principle of "disinterested" judgment which, in each account, will be internalized by every social actor.<sup>6</sup> Following Shaftesbury, Smith claims that one "divides" himself into two persons, the "examiner" or "judge" and the

"one who is judged" (TMS 113). The effect of this splitting is to internalize the impartial spectator, an "imaginary third person" who serves as the embodiment of societal expectations and norms.<sup>7</sup> In effect, one "enters into" (and thus internalizes) the ethos of a society, and through that act, one modulates one's behavior, passions, and desires. "We suppose ourselves the spectators of our own behavior," writes Smith, "and endeavor to imagine what effect it would, in this light, produce on us. This is the only looking-glass by which we can, in some measure, with the eyes of other people, scrutinize the propriety of our own conduct" (TMS 112).

This account of a self-correcting morality has its advantages for feminist critics interested in erecting a moral system distinct from Kantian ethics, or from any ethics of reason. At least one philosopher has seen in Hume's account of moral judgment an alternative to rule-based ethics, which may qualify Hume as "the women's moral theorist" (Baier 40). "To become a good fellow-person," she writes, "one doesn't consult some book of rules, but cultivates one's capacity for sympathy, or fellow feeling, as well as for that judgment needed when conflicts arise between the different demands on us such sympathy may lead us to feel" (Baier 40).<sup>8</sup> One wonders. Admittedly, there is perhaps nothing intrinsically male-biased about an imaginary third party that serves as a "mirror" of pre-existent cultural norms, particularly when those are cast, as they are here, into an historicist account of morality;<sup>9</sup> and the goal of sympathy--to create "correspondence of feeling"--does not

automatically mark the ethics of sympathy as a masculinist enterprise. Yet the discourse of sympathy, I have insisted, does more than mirror the desire for "correspondence of feeling" among already similar creatures; its greater project, as we have seen in the preceding section, is to provide concrete models of social coherence, to "produce" a society based on pleasure from which women, I would argue, are necessarily excluded. In order to see how this works, it is necessary to leave the theory of moral judgment, with all its mirrors, music, spectators, and spectacles, and to examine the gender-specific behaviors which, through those trappings, both Hume and Smith hoped to promote.

Like the ethics of reason, the discourse of sympathy is intrinsically male-biased. As we have seen, despite the seemingly universal metaphors with which sympathy is allied, sympathy, as one critic has flatly stated, is "based upon the desire for self-preservation of equal, independent, and competitive men of the world" (Mizuta 127). In the following section, I shall illustrate how sympathy is a social virtue promoted by men for each other. The ability to sympathize with the pleasure or power (and, simultaneously, to control and regulate pain) is part of a masculine ideal, the "ethic of self command," which both Hume and Smith actively promote. This masculine ideal which may lead to "commerce of feeling" is clearly distinguished from the moral disposition of women, who are encouraged to practice "humanity," the automatic compassion that Hume and Smith would have their male readers rise above. The doctrine of sexual virtues is thus cast into

an implicit hierarchy of values, underwritten by pleasure and pain. The effect of this double-edged mode of engenderment is to displace women from the realm of mutual sympathy. And that, in turn, is to deny that women are capable of ethical judgment at all.

### **The Ethic of Self-Command**

It has often been argued by more skeptical critics than Baier that the greatest contribution of the British benevolists was to underwrite a market economy with a moral system whereby all would seem to benefit from an individual's success, to cast ambition and individual improvement as an intrinsically moral enterprise.<sup>10</sup> Yet without extensive scholarship, one can only speculate about the relationship between economics and sympathy, as those reflect actual social conditions. In other words, it is impossible to determine exactly how the "real" and the "social imaginary"--to borrow terms from contemporary critical theory--interact in eighteenth-century ethics, so that relationship will not be discussed in any depth here. What is apparent, however, is that while both Hume and Smith are often regarded as optimists, their texts reveal an insecurity about the rapidly changing social forces that middle-class men were forced to confront. On the one hand, passages such as the following seem to mark Smith, as popular opinion holds, as one who has a kind of blind faith in social progress.<sup>11</sup> "What can be added," he writes, "to the happiness of the man who is in health, who is out of debt, and who has a clear conscience?" (45) "This situation," he

continues, "may very well be called the natural and ordinary state of mankind" (45). Yet, as though Smith were not sure that this optimistic view is entirely convincing, in the following sentence, he repeats himself: "Notwithstanding the present misery and depravity of the world, so justly lamented, this really is the state of the greater part of men" (TMS 45). This insecurity, or instability, about the present state of the world perhaps helps explain why much of the Theory of Moral Sentiments is devoted to promoting admirable behavior when one is forced to confront the "present misery and depravity of the world."<sup>12</sup> His warning that men should avoid self-indulgence or self-pity in the face of financial misfortune is typical. If a man "should be reduced to beggary and ruin," he writes, and "if he should even be led out to a public execution, and there shed one single tear upon the scaffold, he would disgrace himself for ever in the opinion of all the gallant and generous part of mankind" (TMS 49).

Reasoning from the above examples, it becomes apparent that ethical writing emerges from a culture that Hume and Smith wanted to shape, to control, or to transcend, in part by re-writing the codes of "appropriate" sympathetic response so as to displace whatever threatens equanimity, hope, or repose. Much of Moral Sentiments is devoted to this task. Smith painstakingly outlines the passions as unsocial, social, and selfish (27-43); describes the proper objects of gratitude and resentment (69-71); explains our natural regard for ambition and the distinction of ranks (50-61), justice

and beneficence (78-92), and the sense of duty (171-179). Underwriting all of these "descriptions," however, is Smith's attempt to inculcate a particular ethos based upon "the ethic of self-command" set against what he regards as "passive" emotional response, or a willingness to respond to pain.

In marked contrast to so-called "sentimental literature" (with which the ethics of sympathy are nevertheless sometimes associated) the Theory of Moral Sentiments is peppered with allusions to "weakness" and "effeminacy"--almost interchangeable terms--in the face of suffering that Smith would have his male counterparts rise above. A commonplace of "sentimental" literature, for example, is (as Belford tells Lovelace in Clarissa) that "tears . . . are no signs of an unmanly, but contrarily of a humane nature; they ease the overcharged heart, which would burst but for that kindly and natural relief." Smith inverts this "natural" order by representing such tears as being inconsiderate to the company by which one is surrounded. "When we attend to the representation of a tragedy," he writes:

. . . we struggle against that sympathetic sorrow which the entertainment inspires as long as we can, and we give way to it at least only when we can no longer avoid it: we even then endeavor to cover our concern from the company. If we shed any tears, we carefully conceal them, lest the spectators, not entering into this excessive tenderness, should regard it as effeminacy and weakness.



(TMS 46)

Although this example is meant to illustrate a presumably "natural" reluctance to sympathize with sorrow, it simultaneously associates the "passive virtue" of sympathetic sorrow with "effeminacy and weakness" and sets up Smith's discussion of active virtue promoted through the ethic of self-command.

The ethic of self-command is responsible for "mutual" sympathetic response as that was outlined in the previous section, and to the desire to suppress pain as outlined here. In his chapter "On Propriety," Smith describes the effect of some "more than mortal" character who maintains magnanimity "amidst great distress" (TMS 47-48). Much like the would-be tearful spectator in the preceding example, this fictional hero is able to control his response to suffering and thus to "enter into" the thoughts and feelings of the largely compassionless crowd. "We feel," he writes,

. . . what an immense effort is requisite to silence those violent emotions which naturally agitate and distract those in his situation. We are amazed to find that he can command himself so entirely. His firmness, at the same time, perfectly coincides with our insensibility. He makes no demand upon us for that more exquisite degree of sensibility which we find . . . that we do not possess. There is the most perfect correspondence between his sentiments and ours, and on that

account, the most perfect propriety in his behavior. (TMS 48)

The "firmness" of this character, his "immense" act of repression in the face of suffering marks this fictional hero as a decidedly masculine ideal, set against "weakness" and "effeminacy" in the face of pain.

Significantly, such self-control is dependent upon one's own consciousness of publicness, that is, upon an awareness that one is already in the public eye. He provokes the "complete sympathy and approbation of the spectators," Smith continues, by removing his thoughts from the "naturally terrible or disagreeable in his situation" (TMS 49). Instead, he "fixes his thoughts" upon the only thing that he finds "agreeable," that is, "the applause and admiration" of the crowd (TMS 49). This awareness of public approbation, combined with the feeling that he has control over his own behavior, then "animates and transports him with joy," Smith writes, "and enables him to support that triumphant gaiety which seems to exult in the victory he thus gains over his misfortunes" (TMS 49). The crowd, in turn--"under no fear that [such 'sympathy] will transport [it] to anything that is extravagant and improper" (TMS 49)--responds with "mutual" sympathy combined with "strength and astonishment at that strength of mind" (TMS 48). The end result of this process is "admiration"--both in one's own eyes and in the eyes of others.

Such a desire to suppress or to displace pain may at first sight appear to contradict the regard for others upon which

any ethic of sympathy is presumably based. Smith, however, anticipating this objection, simply incorporates "humanity" into the ethic of self-command as a sensibility to sorrow that must be suppressed, controlled, and finally overcome. First, he argues that "our sensibility to the feelings of others, so far from being inconsistent with the manhood of self-command, is the very principle upon which that manhood is founded" (TMS 152). In his formulation,

The man who feels the most for the joys and the sorrows of others, is best fitted for acquiring the most complete control of his own joys and sorrows. The man of the most exquisite humanity, is naturally the most capable of acquiring the highest degree of self-command. (TMS 152)

This apparent paradox is perfectly in keeping with Smith's description of the function of the impartial spectator. According to his characterization, we recall, one will "naturally" modulate his emotions so that they will correspond with the emotions of the people around him. The "man of the most exquisite humanity," then, because he has more practice in controlling those emotions, will in that sense be capable of "acquiring the highest degree of self-command."

Second, Smith, posits a "higher" humanity based upon the ability to control one's emotions and thus to identify more completely with the impartial spectator. The fact that one is able to control one's response to sorrow--or, more properly,

to displace it--enables men to perceive and to act upon the "higher beauty" of "utility," or to recognize and enter into the systems through which the greater good of society might be served (TMS 192). Self-command is thought to lead, in turn, to a host of public virtues, including "generosity" and "public-spiritedness" (TMS 190-193). From this point of view, those who exercise the ethic of self-command--those who sacrifice their "personal" feeling for the public good--are akin to "good soldiers" who, serving a "greater humanity," are willing to follow the design dictated by the great Director of the universe. "They cheerfully resign their own little systems," Smith writes, "to the prosperity of a greater system" (TMS 236).

What is this "greater system"? Significantly, Smith's higher good has a clearly conservative component. Arguing both against English radicals, inspired by the French Revolution, and against moralists who advocate charity for the poor, Smith claims that the "peace and order of society," which depends on some "natural respect for the rich and powerful" is of "more importance than even the relief of the miserable" (TMS 226). He is interested in preserving the distinction of ranks and order in society, in maintaining the status quo. "The man whose public spirit is prompted altogether by humanity and benevolence," he claims, "will respect the established powers and privileges even of individuals, and still more those of the great orders and societies into which the state is divided" (TMS 233). As this reliance upon established social order suggests, the Theory

of Moral Sentiments is a book haunted from two directions: from fear of the political tyrant, on the one hand, and from fear of the crowd in England, on the other (see Thompson 1974, 395). More importantly, perhaps, this clearly conservative aspect of the text suggests that Smith's determination to ensure social order is directly and unavoidably related to the desire to obscure or smooth over pre-existent structures of inequality in the society itself, so as to focus upon the joys and rewards of individual self-improvement.

If any man hopes to "distinguish himself," Smith writes, "he must be patient in labour, resolute in danger, and firm in distress. These talents he must bring into a public view, by the difficulty, importance, and, at the same time, good judgment of his undertakings" (TMS 55). In short, he must be able, through "appropriate" self-representation, both to identify with public expectations and, through acting upon them, to be capable of evoking admiration and respect. In describing the effects of individual ambition, in fact, Smith borrows metaphors from another aesthetic construct, the sublime. "With what impatience does the man of spirit and ambition," he writes, "look round for some opportunity to distinguish himself?":

No circumstances, which can afford this appear to him undesirable. He even looks forward to the prospect of foreign war, or civil dissension; and, with secret transport and delight, sees through all the confusion

and bloodshed which attend them, the probability of those wished-for occasions presenting themselves, in which he may draw upon himself the attention and admiration of mankind (TMS 55).

In this passage, the middle-class male (any middle-class male) is represented--in potential at least--as a modern hero whose own self-improvement is inextricable related to the success or failure of society as a whole. Presumably, in elevating his own station in society, this modern soldier is simply serving his public duty.

At this point, it is useful to summarize the logic of Smith's argument. As we have seen, the "impartial spectator" is represented as the embodiment of social expectations and norms which, as Smith makes clear, are underwritten not only by a principle of pleasure, but through that, by the ethic of self-command. Given the martial metaphors in particular, it is equally clear that self-command is represented as a masculine enterprise, set against the "weakness" and "effeminacy" of feeling in the face of suffering others. In fact, the text as a whole promotes an esprit de corps based upon a principle of resemblance, the mutual admiration of (upwardly mobile) men for each other. Where, then, are women in this system? What is their function, and what does sympathy have to do with that? David Marshall, noting the absence of women in The Theory of Moral Sentiments, attributes that to Smith's desire to promote the ethic of self-command. He suggests that because Smith "stands for the

opposite of exhibitionism" associated with sensibility, and because the eighteenth century "closely associated both sympathy and sentiment with 'feminine' sensibilities," women are not included in Smith's account of "appropriate" sympathetic response (1986, 184). Leaving aside, for the moment, the presumably historical relationship between women and sensibility, one thing is clear: the ethic of self-command as promoted by Smith is in no way a self-effacing moral structure, as Marshall implies. As we have seen, it is simply a vehicle to greater glory, the means by which one may "distinguish himself," or "draw upon himself the attention and admiration of mankind" (TMS 55). In promoting the ethic of self-command, Smith does not, moreover, exclude women from his system. He simply engenders them, or associates the "feminine" with a particular moral disposition against which men of good will were encouraged to react. In this sense, women are not really absent from the text. Instead, they and the "feminine" virtues they are thought to embody are present as a principle of difference which, by virtue of its difference, is simultaneously devalued.

The engendering we have seen above is duplicated in Smith's discussions of "other"--competing--ethical systems, as well. In his analysis of Stoicism, for example, Smith makes the point that any "extreme" sympathy with the "misfortunes of others whom we know nothing about, seems altogether absurd and unreasonable" (TMS 140). It is "useless," he claims, to feel for people "outside our sphere of activity" (TMS 140). Calling for a "moderated sensibility

to the misfortunes of others," Smith argues that, like the Stoics, one must "control these passive feelings" (TMS 145). "We esteem the man who supports pain and even torture," he writes, "with manhood and firmness; . . . and we can have little regard for him who sinks under them, and abandons himself to useless outcries and womanish lamentations (TMS 244). Aligning his system with the "manly" ethics of the ancients, Smith establishes its superiority to the "desponding, plaintive, and whining tone of some modern systems" of morality (TMS 283). In their openness to the suffering and disempowered, Smith argues, such systems "soften" rather than "elevate" the mind (TMS 325-26). By virtue of this feminization in the Theory of Moral Sentiments, the cult of benevolism practiced by Hutcheson and others is effectively displaced.

The most interesting aspect of this text is the way that sex and economics are so strangely and intimately allied. Lest one be tempted to overemphasize one or the other--to read this move, for example, as a mark of Smith's "fear" of "feminine" sexuality, or simply as part of bourgeois ideology--it is useful to back away from the analyses above, and to consider the logic of text as a whole. Within this system, (to borrow a term from Luce Irigaray) the female sex has no "specificity" (69); instead, the "feminine" serves as a social accusation. To put it another way, the "feminine" is not so much a description of female behavior as it is a by-product of ethical writing, a strategy by which the "other" is removed. This point, however subtle, has everything to do



with how one reads the discourse as a mode of engenderment.

As I have mentioned, Carol Kay has argued that the moralists of the mid-eighteenth century--Smith, Hume, and Rousseau--were distinguished from Hobbes in taking a "more positive view of woman's sensitiveness" which, to a certain extent, they desired to share (1986, 71). Yet, she continues, in an "apparently contradictory move, they reintroduced a masculine difference" embodied in the ethic of self-command. This "neoclassicizing reintroduction to virtue" she calls the "remasculinization" of moral theory, "putting the vir, the Latin word for man, back into virtue" (1986, 71). From this point of view, male moralists appropriated seemingly natural feminine qualities and shaped those their own ends. Much of the analysis above seems to accord with this view, yet a troubling question remains: when, in moral theory, did "feminine" virtues, including "sensitiveness," ever serve as the basis of an ethical system, much less as the basis of one that had to be "remasculinized"? And since when has the "feminine" served as anything other than a social accusation, by which other, competing, moral theories could be displaced? Ethical theory--produced and propagated by men--will necessarily serve to reflect and reinforce the structures of a society dominated by men, as well. Rather than making arguments based on some pre-conceived and empirical difference, then, it is important to attend to the hierarchy of values at the basis of any ethical system itself.<sup>13</sup>

Here, these operate through an implicit binary. Both Hume and Smith seek to join sympathy to a principle of pleasure,

which, they imply, is largely the province of middle class men practicing the ethic of self-command. In their systems, the "feminine" is associated with weakness and fear, an association that turns upon women's presumably natural response to pain. In this sense (again to paraphrase Luce Irigaray) "Woman herself is never at issue" (70). Instead the feminine is "always described in terms of deficiency or atrophy, as the other side of the sex that alone holds a monopoly on value (69). In employing the "feminine" as a de-valued principle of difference, moreover, Hume and Smith are actually drawing upon a characterization of womanish weakness as old as ethical writing itself. Aristotle, for example, who had represented women as the passive principle of life, argued that because "woman is more compassionate than man, more easily moved to tears" she is "more shrinking, more difficult to rouse to action"--and therefore, he adds, "requires a smaller amount of nutrient" (49). Given women's seemingly natural inertia, "the nature of the man is the most rounded off and complete" (49). Similarly, Hume and Smith do not appear to be "appropriating" some natural feminine morality to their own ends; they are, instead, reinforcing women's age-old place as man's moral inferior within a hierarchy of values where this difference is easily obscured. The result is that "mutual sympathetic response" is a less universal phenomenon--or, a more discriminating trope--than we might otherwise assume.

### Naturalizing Sympathy

In order to naturalize the system outlined above--to represent it as organic, universal, and true--Smith and Hume must not only establish the moral superiority of men; they must redirect the "normal" path of the sympathetic imagination toward pleasure and away from pain. First Smith, like Hume before him, broadens the definition of sympathy to include a host of emotions. "Pity and compassion," Smith writes,

are words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Sympathy, though its meaning was, perhaps, originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatsoever.

(TMS 10)<sup>14</sup>

Later, however, claiming that "it is painful to go along with grief, and we always enter into it with reluctance" (TMS 46), Smith seeks to align the sympathetic imagination almost exclusively with the ability to respond to "joy"; through a complicated slight of hand, he argues that "our propensity to sympathize with joy," is, in fact, "much stronger than our propensity to sympathize with sorrow" (TMS 45). Although the ability to respond to sorrow is, then, "an original passion" which even "the greatest ruffian" shares (TMS 9), the ability to respond to joy is somehow more authentic: "Our sorrow at a funeral generally amounts to no more than an affected gravity; but our mirth at a christening or a marriage, is

always from the heart, and without any affectation" (TMS 47).

Given that even "ruffians" have the natural ability to respond to pain, sympathy derived from pleasure is represented as the more civilized response, as the one most indicative of truly social impulses. As some of the examples above indicate, this form of sympathy has a vested interest in structures of community: in "commerce of feeling," in christenings and marriages, and in what Smith calls the "distinction of ranks," or in preserving social hierarchy and order. It also, however, seeks to naturalize one's admiration for wealth and power, to make the sympathetic imagination, now allied with pleasure, virtually a vehicle of social progress itself.

We can see how this works in the ethics of Hume and Smith by isolating the ways in which the sympathetic imagination reflects and reinforces structures of power thought to characterize the real or ideal society. As Carol Kay has argued,<sup>15</sup> Hume holds that the sympathetic imagination is responsible for one's pleasurable identification with the wealthy and the powerful. According to Hume, for example, our esteem for both riches and the beautiful objects they may procure arises chiefly from sympathy with the imagined satisfaction of the owner (Treatise 359-362). Since the sympathetic imagination always, says Hume, "passes more easily to the empowered," it is also used to justify social difference or to obscure exclusion deemed necessary to social progress. "'Tis a quality of human nature," he writes, "that the imagination naturally turns to whatever is important and

considerable; and where two objects are presented to it, a small one and a great one, usually leaves the former, and dwells entirely upon the latter" (Treatise 309). We can see this even in Hume's description of the eighteenth-century family. To illustrate, in the following example Hume justifies and explains away fundamental male-biases of a culture on the basis of the "natural" workings of the sympathetic imagination. As "in the society of marriage," he writes, "the male sex has the advantage above the female," in the association of ideas,

the husband first engages our attention... 'Tis easy to see, that this property must strengthen the child's relation to the father, and weaken that to the mother . . . as we have a stronger propensity to pass from the idea of the children to that of the father, from the same idea to that of the mother, we ought to regard the former relation as the closer and more considerable. This is the reason why children commonly bear their father's name, and are esteem'd to be of nobler or baser birth, according to his family. (Treatise 309)

The sympathetic imagination appears here to be animated by what Kay terms a "principle of imaginative attraction to the greater person" (77-78). This principle is used to explain the basis of the patriarchal family whose asymmetrical structures Hume would protect. In other places, the principle

of attraction to the greater person becomes aligned with an impulse of upward mobility--indeed, the imagination serves as a barometer of one's ambition and taste.

Similarly, in the Theory of Moral Sentiments, Smith attributes the desire to be wealthy to the notion that we have a "natural disposition" to sympathize with the rich and powerful. "The rich man glories in his riches," Smith writes, because he feels that they naturally draw upon him the attention of the world, and that mankind are disposed to go along with him in all those agreeable emotions with which the advantages of situation so readily inspire him. (TMS 50-51)

The "poor man," in contrast, "goes out and comes in unheeded, and when in the midst of a crowd is in the same obscurity as if shut up in a hovel" (TMS 51). The greater part of his misery is not physical discomfort. Instead, it is derived from the awareness that his poverty removes him from the mutual sympathetic response through which greater society is organized; poverty "places him out of the sight of mankind," writes Smith, or "if they take any notice of him, they have . . . scarce any fellow-feeling with the misery and distress which he suffers" (TMS 51).

In each of its aspects, sympathy betrays and legitimizes a seemingly natural desire toward upward mobility, or, at least, toward identification with wealth and power. Thus despite Smith's seemingly compassionate references to the disempowered (such as the impoverished man); despite his

condescending appreciation of woman's "exquisite humanity"; and despite his chapter-long accolade to the blessings of the "domestic affections"; the "most respectable" attachment to another individual in the Theory of Moral Sentiments is, Smith argues, the friendship between or among virtuous men. In fact, now that sympathy is allied with a "natural" principle of pleasure, such attachments are represented as being prior to culture, or, to use his term, "involuntary":

Such friendships, arising not from a constrained sympathy, not from a sympathy which has been assumed and rendered habitual for the sake of conveniency and accommodation [such as the affection for family members]; but from a natural sympathy, from an involuntary feeling that the persons to whom we attach ourselves are the natural and proper objects of esteem and approbation, can exist only among men of virtue [emphasis added]. (TMS 224)

Once again, the "involuntary" sympathy between ambitious men, or the "proper objects of esteem," is dependent upon their having exercised the ethic of self command. It is dependent, in other words, upon their having "distinguished" themselves--upon their having controlled, suppressed, or finally displaced whatever is painful, or weak, or "feminine," both in themselves and, ultimately, in the culture they hope to control. It is dependent, in short, upon their having substituted a positive version of "natural" sympathy for a

less positive one, now associated exclusively with women. These strategies, I believe, support my argument that sympathy is a double-edged mode of engenderment, or that "sensitiveness" and "compassion" as peculiarly feminine virtues arise simultaneously with the ethic of self-command, so that the latter may establish a point of difference within that hierarchy on which its legitimacy is based.<sup>16</sup>

### Women and Disempowerment

As I have already mentioned, if the ethics of sympathy are male-biased, they are so in a complicated way, in terms of a constantly-shifting hierarchy of value that nevertheless serves to preserve unequal relations of power. By abstracting the language of sympathy from the concrete conditions of its production, I have analyzed its logic. While in popular parlance, sympathy is usually taken to be humanitarian feeling for some generalized other, I have argued that it is finally a vehicle of ethical inscription which pretends to be divorced from the relations of power that characterize eighteenth-century society, even while it reflects and reinforces those relations. Sympathy functions as a Janus-faced phenomenon--as a (masculine) principle of communication and as a (feminine) openness to suffering. Clearly, however, this argument is deceptively simple. When sympathy is regarded, as it has been here, as an axiological term--as one involved in the self-conscious writing of value--it seems to assume some meta-historical status; it seems, in fact, to bear the burden of culture itself. That is not the



impression I wish to convey. Although it has been necessary, for the sake of analysis, to foreground a relationship between the ethics of sympathy and masculine power, I do not mean to imply that ethical discourse was single-handedly "responsible" for the secondary status of eighteenth-century women. The discourse, after all, is itself implicated in changing social conditions--including class consciousness, property rights, and marriage laws--which I do not address. Nor do I mean to suggest that women were the unwilling victims of a dominant mode of discourse through which they were duped, co-opted, and eventually displaced. As I shall discuss later, writers such as Wollstonecraft and More actively sought to revise the ethics of sympathy, to amend the hierarchy of values outlined here. Yet only by having put the ethics of sympathy within a context that allows for analysis of the hierarchy of values that sympathy seek to promote, are we finally allowed to see what is at stake for Hume, Smith, and others: the values of middle-class individualism on which liberalism--and, I might add, popular conceptions of community--are based. And these values, like those of the ethics of sympathy, have different implications for men and women.

Within this context, the most significant and "novel" thing about the ethics of sympathy is not simply that Hume, Smith, and others retain the age-old association between compassion and "womanly weakness"; it is, instead, that they place this mode of feminization within a peculiarly modern frame, within a larger argument about the importance of the

"domestic affections" and "public duty," where the hierarchy of value intrinsic to the ethics of sympathy is easily obscured. We have already previewed this asymmetrical structure in the distinction drawn by Hume and Smith between the "amiable virtues" and the "virtues of esteem"--between "pity," a sign of weakness, and "sympathy" as a form of mutual response. According to Smith, women are characterized mostly by their ability to respond: to "grieve for [another's] sufferings, to resent their injuries, and to rejoice at their good fortune" (TMS 186). Undoubtedly, these so-called feminine qualities are valued, but it is interesting that they are represented as involuntary responses to others that Hume and Smith, each in their own way, would have their male counterparts rise above. In Smith's account, the "soft" virtues are thought to be "antecedent to [one's] connection with society" (TMS 192). The virtues of "esteem," in contrast, are represented as being "in consequence of that connexion," or as being socially-learned and exclusively male roles. Generosity, for example, a virtue of "esteem," is the willingness to make donations; the willingness to give up a desired position to a better man; the willingness to sacrifice one's life for one's country. Unlike woman's "humanity," generosity implies an appeal to public functions that will serve to measure one's worth; it is to act with "propriety" in light of the "greater system," or, as Smith will write, to act "so as to deserve applause" (TMS 192-93). Significantly, these are virtues from which women, given the structure of eighteenth-century

society, are necessarily excluded. To mark women as "naturally" passive receptacles for the emotions of others, then, (however much that reflects woman's real social status) is simultaneously to reinforce that status as marginalized figures within an asymmetrical society. In fact, in the eyes of the moralist, women are thereby represented as subjects of pity themselves: "There is a helplessness in the character of extreme humanity," Smith writes, "which more than anything interests our pity" (40).

Women occupy a precarious position in the discourse of sympathy. While their compassionate qualities are thought to be necessary to the good society, those, clearly, are not held in equal esteem. In fact, they appear to be precisely what eighteenth-century ethical theory defines itself against. When these gender-specific virtues are placed within the logic of sympathy as a whole, moreover, its male-biased implications quickly multiply. Because women do not have that previous "connexion" with society--because they are always already marginalized and disempowered--they cannot internalize the impartial spectator. And this means, in effect, that they cannot serve as judges of their own moral behavior. Endowed, perhaps, with the potential or the nascent humanity to exercise mutual sympathy, because they are private creatures, women have no opportunity to do so. They are instead represented as the passive subjects of a masculinist ethics who, in a by-now familiar formulation, simply have little or no access to the "higher good."<sup>17</sup> These marginalized but "feeling" others, given their economic

and ethical dependency, can but rely on men, whose "awful" virtues in contrast mark them as the arbiters of social progress. Within this fairly self-enclosed system, humanity--an automatic response to the emotions of others--is represented as the only virtue, the only ambition, to which women may aspire.

The recognition that sympathy is somehow allied with schemes for social progress, where those are dependent upon a mode of engenderment, underscores the essentially political nature of the discourse. Although I have focused upon a few aspects of one small part of moral theory here, as part of an ideology (as distinct from a self-contained history), the politics of sympathy can best be analyzed in terms of their proliferation, in terms of how essential value-structures are promoted by virtue of their apparent difference from one another. It is thus helpful to turn away from ethics, where the politics of sympathy are most clearly systematized, to more "literary" writing, where they intersect with sentimentalism, sensibility, and other seemingly pervasive "structures of feeling" by which mid- to late-eighteenth-century writing is often defined.

## Notes to Chapter One

1. Indeed many critics of the "novel of the sentiment" still regard "sympathy" and "compassion" as equivalent terms. Undoubtedly, this tendency can be traced to Crane's foundational article on the "man of feeling," the evidence for which was largely drawn from Latitudinarian writings on compassion. Recently, in an excellent essay on the patho-sympathetic tradition in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, Bystrom (also discussing the influence of the Latitudinarians) regards "sympathy" and "compassion" as being synonymous. An exception to this trend is Kenneth MacLean, who points out in an early article (1949) that Sterne, like Smith, distrusts unthinking compassion and sought, instead, to align sympathy with the "imagination."
2. It is noteworthy, for example, that Luce Irigaray has written critiques of Plato, Kant, Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, but has not addressed Hume and Smith.
3. This argument is in contrast to the analyses of Radner, Fiering, and those critics who lump Hume and Smith together with religious writers. It is in essential agreement with the analyses set forth in Kay (1983) and Mullan, who argues that in the Treatise "sympathy is a 'natural' principle by which different positions and interests are socialized" (30).
4. Boulton has suggested that the relationship between music, beauty, and the "correspondence of feeling" was often attributed to Burke (lxxxv).
5. Paul de Man's argument in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" is that romanticism's apparent reliance upon the language of correspondences (symbol, analogy, etc.) to express a (perceived) relationship between man and nature may actually be regarded as allegory, where the union is desired rather than achieved. I believe that allegory is central to the figure of sympathy, as well, that is, the figure is dependent upon an appropriate narrative of the emotions. My assumptions about its status, however, are different. Whereas De Man treats "sympathy" and "affinity" as figures that signify failed desire, I treat them as figures that serve within a political context to generate meaning. The telos of his argument also differs from mine. Whereas I believe that sympathy works in many ways throughout eighteenth and nineteenth century writing, but always to ground some subject-object relation, De Man claims that a "relationship with nature" in romantic writing is "superceded by an intersubjective, interpersonal relationship that, in the last analysis, is a relationship of the subject toward itself (196). In a sense, then, he retains, however abstractly, the myth of the solitary romantic in Bate (1945 and 1961), Abrams, Bloom, and even Marshall.

6. The concept of disinterestedness is also borrowed from aesthetic writing. While the relationship between ethics and aesthetics in eighteenth-century moral theory is enormously complex, it is usually traced to Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, who sought to align moral judgment with contemporary standards of taste. The following texts serve as a passable introduction: Raphael 1947, 71-91; Dickie 52-77; Boulton xxxii-xxxix; Stolnitz 1961a and 1961b; and Cottom 1-34, who is more critical of this "aristocratic" desire to promote certain principles of taste. The social dimension of aesthetics is, however, easily obscured (for an analysis of this, see Fabricant). For an interesting discussion of this phenomenon in relation to critical theory, see Shapiro.

7. The best article on the impartial spectator is still D.D. Raphael's, but for a more recent and, in many ways, more Nietzschean account, see Harvey Mitchell.

8. Baier readily admits that Hume represents women as the "timorous and pious" sex, and that he makes any number of sexist remarks; she is willing to attribute these to his "social realism" since "what matters most, for judging moral wisdom, are corrected sentiments, imagination, and cooperative genius," qualities which women share, and perhaps even possess to a greater degree (53). For a partial corrective to this hopeful mis-reading of Hume, see MacLeod Burns and Marcil-Lacoste, the latter of whom argues that "Hume makes it impossible to distinguish an experiential explanation of the inferior status of women from a philosophical justification of this inferiority as being morally just" (69). Given Hume's "intellectual sexism" (what I would call his male-biased moral economy) it is better, Marcil-Lacoste concludes, not to rely upon his works for any feminist ethics.

9. Yet this point is debatable, since the impartial spectator is undeniably related to what Lacanians, semiologists, and some structuralists identify as the male or phallic "gaze" through which, according to neo-Freudian theory, the object of the gaze "is cast as its passive, masochistic, feminine victim" (Moi 180n). The foundational essay on the "gaze" is Mulvey, whose argument is confined to the visual arts. See also Owens.

10. Generally speaking, the interpretation that follows is based upon the idea that Hume and Smith are somehow related to the tradition of "possessive individualism," an argument first set forth by C.B. McPherson. For more general discussions of the relationship between ethics and economics in Hume, see David Miller; in Smith, see Napoleoni 25-60. The best historical overviews of this problem are Heilbroner and Hirschman.

11. "Popular opinion," of course, refers to those eighteenth-century scholars who, following Louis I. Bredvold (1949, 18) still divide eighteenth-century writers into the "tough-

mind" and the "tender-minded," the romantics and the realists. This is a curious division (meant to underscore the manly moral seriousness of the Tory satirists) and one, I suspect, that says as much about the binary structures upon which eighteenth-century scholars have relied as it does about the period or the writers in question.

12. This ambivalence may seem to underscore Arthur O. Lovejoy's point that eighteenth-century optimism is built upon an inherent dualism whereby it is important to explain away evils so as to triumph over them (320-321). It is interesting, however, that this "triumph" is expressed through a mode of engenderment.

13. This argument is set forth by Carol Kay, in "Canon, Ideology, Gender," 71-72. My argument differs from Kay's in that I do not believe that "compassion" can be accepted as a moral truth of women against which men define themselves. I would argue, in fact, that feminization of compassion is part of a larger ethical program whereby moral judgment is located in something other than obedience and subservience to God. This argument is implicit in the chapters that follow.

14. See also Smith's allusions to Bishop Butler (43): "Our sympathy with sorrow, though not more real, has been more taken notice of than our sympathy with joy. The word sympathy, in its most proper and primitive signification, denoted our fellow-feeling with the sufferings, not that with the enjoyments, of others." Smith presents his project as one of "completion" when in fact, through it, sympathy as suffering is displaced.

13. In Kay's analysis (1983), eighteenth-century theories of sympathy have little to do with compassion, and everything to do with the attempt of Hume and others to promote an ethic of upward mobility. "One important clue that sympathy for Hume figures in an ethics that is crucially attached to a politics," she writes, "is that he shows relatively little interest in sympathy manifested in pity or compassion, and a great deal of interest in sympathy as a mechanism of pride in or respect for power, riches, family status" (80-81). In so doing, she suggests, Hume displaces women and other "inferiors" from the society of sympathetic subjects, and reinforces, instead, a "rather disappointing association with the prevailing status quo: the respect paid to a virtuous, well-established gentleman" (89).

16. Given the importance placed upon the impartial spectator as the embodiment of masculine social norms to which only men may aspire, it should be clear that sympathy, despite its pretensions to the contrary, shares the impulse toward the exclusion of women apparent in eighteenth-century political thought as a whole: to create a society composed of men by privileging the dominant trope of "fraternity." As Seyla Benhabib has argued, early bourgeois thinkers, having reacted against feudal society, were dependent upon the "state of

nature" metaphor to purify the society which, in fact, they hoped to inscribe. They represented a society in which all men, or at least most men, are brothers: "in the beginning man was alone" (84). "The early bourgeois individual," she continues, "not only has no mother but no father as well; rather, he strives to reconstitute the father in his own self-image" (85).

17. This comment is based upon D.D. Raphael's argument that "Adam Smith's theory can certainly stand comparison with the best known of modern psychological explanations of conscience, Freud's account of the super-ego" (97). Freud's exclusion of women from cultural production is outlined in "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" (1925). Given Freud's theory of development, "the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in men...they show less sense of justice...they are less ready to submit to the great exigencies of life...they are more often influenced in their judgments by feelings of affection or hostility" (25). In drawing an analogy between theories of sympathy and Freud, I am not, of course, suggesting that Freud's analysis is correct. Instead, I am pointing to the fact that ethical discourse, which includes Freudian psychology, shares the impulse to exclude women from value-formation even while rationalizing that exclusion.



## Chapter II: Men, Women, and the Sympathetic Sublime

In the previous chapter, I argued that secular accounts of sympathy, in alliance with eighteenth-century aesthetics, turn upon identification with a principle of pleasure and power from which women, by virtue of their association with compassion, are simultaneously excluded. In this sense, the ethics of sympathy may be regarded as a kind of bifurcated program of social control, whose larger intention was to create bonds between presumably virtuous men. The question central to this chapter is to what extent more "literary" writing shares in that impulse, as well.<sup>1</sup> In some ways, the relationship between sympathy and literature is well-worked terrain. An entire tradition of criticism on sentiment and sensibility, for example, has been devoted to exploring with R.S. Crane what, or who, makes the "man of feeling" feel. A second and related tradition, led by Earl Wasserman with David Marshall perhaps bringing up the rear, has focused upon theories of tragic pleasure, particularly in regard to sympathy and the aesthetics of spectatorship. My subject is considerably more defined. Here I shall examine the relationship between sympathy and one very specific form of eighteenth-century aesthetic writing, the sympathetic sublime.<sup>2</sup>

First, however, it is perhaps necessary to clarify my critical position. Because I regard both the ethics of

sympathy and, by extension, the sympathetic sublime, as being part of the writing of value--where "the writing of value," we recall, refers to the process by which social relationships, roles, and values were actively being promoted--my assumptions are necessarily in conflict with any reading that pre-supposes some "masculine" or "feminine" theory of moral development. These, not surprisingly, dominate in criticism on the sublime. At least since the publication of Harold Bloom's essentially Freudian Anxiety of Influence, it has become a commonplace of romantic criticism that the sublime is derived from the Oedipal complex, a pre-existent and peculiarly "masculine" moral disposition reflected in the works of an individual writer.<sup>3</sup> Since, given Freudian logic, only males participate in this form of development, psychoanalysis offers both a way of explaining the sublime--of isolating its structures--and of accounting for the fact that it was practiced mostly by male poets who, in the words of Thomas Weiskel, achieve a moment when "the burden of the past is lifted and there is an influx of power" (Weiskel 192). This genetic explanation is adopted by many early feminist critics, as well, who noted and sought to explain the absence of the "sublime moment" in the writing of women.<sup>4</sup> Most recently, a second wave of psychoanalytic feminists, understandably disturbed at the thought of defining women's writing in terms of its relation to male models of development alone, have adopted the pre-oedipal theory of Nancy Chodorow or Carol Gilligan to locate a separate "feminine" model of development manifest, they

believe, in the structure of women's writing. In this context, a neglected writer such as Dorothy Wordsworth can easily emerge as a morally-superior counterpoint to a "sublime" poet such as her brother William. According to Susan Levin, rather than attempting to expand the boundaries of the individual self--an imperialist movement central to the sublime--Dorothy "writes herself into the figure of a community" (1987, 147) where "shared lives and values shape and sustain individual desire" (148).

I would not want to deny, of course, that there are observable differences between the writing of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, or that, as far as we know, men more often than women appropriate the sublime mode; yet such theories of "masculine" and "feminine" moral development, I believe, have played an important role in both suppressing the formative role of ethico-aesthetic discourse in organizing gender-specific moralities, and, correspondingly, in obscuring the ways in which those historically-grounded notions of "masculine" and "feminine" morality change. This problem is all the more immediate because, I would argue, values and impulses articulated in late-eighteenth-century ethical and aesthetic texts continue to shape our habits of reading and writing.<sup>5</sup> I would like to offer the possibility, in fact, that the discourse of sympathy helped to provide the terms by which we too-easily characterize "masculine" and "feminine" morality, even while those moral sensibilities were actively being organized and contested. Though there is no way to "prove" that a gender-specific morality cannot be

explained in psychoanalytic terms, it is possible and even necessary to argue that one should examine historically-specific factors before doing so.

As Fraser and Nicholson have pointed out, Chodorow's idea that "women everywhere differ from men in their greater concern with 'relational interaction'" cannot hold up under close scrutiny (97). I believe it to be significant, for example, that in the eighteenth-century, women were not the primary group to define themselves in terms of the ability to "care." In fact, as Lawrence Stone has argued, this language is associated with the rise of "affective individualism" and a peculiarly middle-class phenomenon, the emergence of the "affective" nuclear family. Between 1660 and 1800, Stone demonstrates, British society experienced a "major shift in human relations" (246). In contrast to the aristocracy who had long used marriage as a means of increasing their wealth and power, and to the lower classes who often did not marry at all, increasingly, writers as diverse as John Locke, Daniel Defoe, Adam Smith, and Mary Wollstonecraft claimed that the best marriage was one founded upon mutual respect and friendship. Perhaps for the first time, such affective ties were regarded as being important to the parent/child relationship, as well. Men, for example, began to take pride in their roles as active and affectionate fathers. As Stone notes, "Even public figures like admirals now boasted on their tombstones of their domestic virtues, such as 'filial reverence, conjugal attachments and parental affection'" (246). Similarly, women (many of whom who were now confined

to the home) began to take a more active part in their children's rearing and education. Perhaps the most tangible symptom of this was a renewed interest in breastfeeding. Whereas in the seventeenth century the "more puritanically inclined mothers" were the first women from well-to-do families to breastfeed their children, by the mid-eighteenth century, writes Stone, this practice was a widespread phenomenon, particularly among the squirearchy and the upper bourgeoisie (284).

The discourse of sympathy intersects with the "rise of affective individualism" in any number of interesting and fairly obvious ways. One notes, for example, the emphasis in the writing of sympathy upon the intensely familial nature of man, and the idea, promoted by Burke, that sympathy is one of the "social passions" responsible for the propagation of the species. Yet this presumably universal ethos, as we have seen, masks what must be regarded as the unequal relations of power intrinsic to its operation. One also notes, in retrospect, the way in which the discourse of sympathy promotes a gender-specific morality upon which the "affective family" and other related phenomena were based. Rather than reflecting a gender-specific morality, the discourse of sympathy creates different roles for men and women. However natural or traditional these gender-specific virtues may appear to us today, it is important to recognize that they are themselves the product of an emergent middle-class creating models that would justify and promote, among other things, a cultural division of labor: through the discourse

of sympathy, women might willingly be confined to the home, and men might be encouraged to represent themselves as productive members of (a more "humane") society, intent upon their own self-improvement for the greater good of the state.

In this sense, members of both sexes were encouraged to form relationships. The difference between their moral behavior emerges simply in the kinds of relationships they were expected to form and in the way, I would add, those relationships were valued. In this chapter, then, in contrast to critics who assume that the sublime reflects an imperialistic and masculine moral disposition set against some feminine desire for relationship, I shall read the sympathetic sublime as male-biased system of representation that actively seeks to produce social relations which differ for men and women. After a brief discussion of the relationship between sympathy, the sublime, and tragic response, I shall analyze William Wordsworth's "The Thorn." In this poem, while William appears to promote sympathetic identification with the female character Martha Ray, I shall demonstrate that Wordsworth's larger purpose, much like Smith's, is to promote identification with a principle of power manifest in the language of men. Within this construct, women, or "the feminine," can but serve as objects of pity who provoke what Wordsworth calls the "real" language of men, with which, he argues, readers should be able to sympathize. The effect of such poems is to extend the bonds between members of two different classes, but only by virtue of the fact that the relationship between women and "natural"

suffering--that is, between women, solitude, powerlessness, and pain--remains unchanged. I shall conclude the chapter with a brief look at Dorothy's resistance to this structure in her brother's writing, and address the issue of whether or not that can be productively cast into some theory of gender identity.

### **Pleasure, Pain, and Power**

As many critics have commented, eighteenth-century theorists of sympathy must all deal with an issue that goes back at least as far as Aristotle's Poetics: that people seem to delight in artistic portrayals of human suffering.<sup>6</sup> This apparently undeniable fact of human nature created a real dilemma for mid-eighteenth-century aesthetic writers, who, with Smith, desired to remove sympathy from its traditional association with pity and the sentimental tradition, to align it with a more stable principle of moral judgment. Thus even early writers of aesthetics were at great pains to represent tragic pleasure in such a way as to preclude some seemingly maudlin or even cruel identification with suffering. As Addison describes it:

When we read of Torment, Wounds, Death, and like Dismal Accidents, our pleasure does not flow so properly from the Grief which such Melancholy Descriptions give us, as from the secret Comparison which we make between ourselves and the Person who suffers. Such Representations teach us to set a just and

true value upon our own good Fortunes, which  
 exempts us from the like Calamities. (No.  
 411)

This "secret Comparison"--the source, presumably, of tragic pleasure--is possible only because one is able to maintain a certain distance from actual pain, that is, only because the torments, wounds, and accidents are imitations, and therefore unreal. As Addison continues, "In person, our thoughts are so intent upon the Miseries of the Sufferer, that we cannot turn them upon our own Happiness" (No. 411).<sup>7</sup>

Addison's explanation of--or, more precisely, his apology for--the "delight" one takes in scenes of suffering is dependent upon a mimetic theory of art drawn from the model of the theatre, where sympathy functions as little more than a principle of audience response. Generally speaking, the actor's passions were thought to be "rehearsed" in the breast of the spectator, who, by virtue of his safe distance, was able to enjoy the suffering onstage. This mimetic model, however, was actively being contested by writers such as Edmund Burke, who, I shall argue, much like Hume and Smith, wanted to establish sympathy as an active principle of social progress, divorced from any association with passive suffering or useless pain.

In his Enquiry into...the Sublime and Beautiful (1757), for example, Edmund Burke dismisses Addison's notion that the sympathetic powers of art may be attributed either to the "comfort we receive from considering that so melancholy a story is no more than a fiction" or to the "contemplation of



our own freedom from the evils which we see represented" (44-45). Claiming, instead, that "we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others" (45),<sup>8</sup> Burke attempts to do two things: to align sympathy with an intrinsically moral impulse, and to make that sympathetic impulse central to an expressivist theory of art and perception. His explanation of the ethical power of sympathy is contained in the section on "The effects of Sympathy in the distresses of others" (XIV). First, asserting that "our Creator has designed we should be united by the bond of sympathy," he argues that this bond is "strengthened" by the "delight" we have in the distresses of others. "There is no spectacle we so commonly pursue, as that of some uncommon and grievous calamity" (46). While this desire to witness suffering could be regarded as a sign of moral indifference, Burke insists that it serves a moral purpose. "The delight we have in such things, hinders us from shunning scenes of misery; and the pain we feel, prompts us to relieve ourselves in relieving those who suffer" (46).

Here, Burke represents sympathy with real suffering as a moral "instinct," as the signature of one's "general passion" for society (52) that works, almost automatically, to effect public good. Having joined this "new" version of sympathy to a principle of social action--having rescued it, that is, from the aesthetics of spectatorship--Burke begins to distinguish between two different structures of sympathetic response. While, in general, sympathy guarantees that "we are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of almost

anything which men can do or suffer" (44), Burke argues that the precise nature of one's response is dependent upon whether sympathy is aligned with pleasure or whether it is aligned with pain. When it turns upon pleasure, it functions as the source of the "social affections"--the desire for "generation" (the source, according to Burke, of love between the sexes) and the desire for "good company, lively conversations, and the endearments of friendship" (43). When, in contrast, it turns upon pain, sympathy may "partake of the nature of those [passions] which regard self-preservation" and may be "a source of the sublime" (44). Given that the sublime is thought to derived from the desire for "self-preservation," it at first may appear to be an egocentric construct set in opposition to the "social affections," which turn upon a principle of pleasure. My suggestion, however, is that the sublime is not so much ego-centric structure as it is an androcentric one. In Burke and Wordsworth, at least, the sublime functions much like a structure we have already seen, the ethic of self-command, to actively create a special kind of relationship which, unlike compassion, promotes identification with a principle of power.

The sublime is a complicated subject, even in Burke, but the following generalizations should suffice to make its basic logic clear.<sup>9</sup> The source of the sublime is "whatever is fitted to excite the ideas of pain, and danger": "terrible" objects, or whatever is "conversant about terrible objects," or whatever "operates in a manner analogous to terror" (39). The word "ideas" here is significant, since, like all

aesthetic experience, the sublime can only occur when pain and danger are distant or simply fictitious. As Burke writes, when ideas of pain and danger "immediately effect us" they are "simply painful"; when, however, they pose no immediate threat, they excite a kind of "delight," a mixed pleasure turning on pain associated with the removal of pain or danger. The sympathetic imagination is central to the sublime because it enables one to identify with the source of terror without actually being threatened. In fact, by virtue of this identification with whatever is great or terrible, sympathy actually serves to endow the observing subject with a sense of power. As Burke puts it, the mind claims "to itself. some part of the dignity and importance of the thing which it contemplates" (50-51). Elsewhere, in words that echo Smith's characterization of the virtuous man, Burke describes sublime contemplation as involving a kind of "philosophical fortitude" (69).

The suggestion, then, is that the sublime--even though it pays lip-service to the value of benevolism--marks the point in eighteenth-century writing where identification with the agent as opposed to the victim of suffering is represented as a desirable aesthetic event. Consequently, a major part of the Inquiries is devoted to listing sublime subjects, the forces or powers that are considered to be fitting sources of terror--obscurity, privation, the cries of animals, even particular colors. Many of these involve natural scenes, events, or situations which, in the telling, could provoke a sense of delight (images of a tower, the archangel, the

rising of mists, the revolutions of kingdoms) whereas many of them refer simply to "pure and intellectual ideas"--ideas like the "Deity"--to which, Burke argues, one should "ascend" (68). In every case, however, what is important is not simply the fact of power, but the way in which, through the sublime, one is able to appropriate it, to make it (however briefly) one's very own. It is in this sense, I believe, that the sublime is not completely unrelated to the intentionality of the masculine form of sympathy as we have seen it elsewhere--to what Kay so aptly calls "a principle of imaginative attraction to the greater power."

To put it another way, because the Burkean sublime encourages one to identify with the source of power, and not with the one who suffers, it shares, however ephemerally, the impulse of The Theory of Moral Sentiments--i.e., to promote an empowering form of individual sympathetic response, distinguished from Christian charity or even from compassion as such. Although there is nothing intrinsically male-biased about this form of sympathetic response, the impulse toward pleasure and power manifest in the sympathetic sublime is closely related to a second "social passion" in the Enquiries which definitely is. This passion is "ambition," a gift, like sympathy, "implanted" by God in man (50) which presupposes public relationships even while it attempts to create them.<sup>10</sup> As Burke describes "ambition"--in language, significantly, indistinguishable from that used to characterize both sympathy as a "social affection" and the sympathetic sublime--it is "whatever either on good or bad grounds tends to raise

a man in his own opinion,"

produces a sort of swelling and triumph that is extremely grateful to the human mind; and this swelling is never more perceived, nor operates with more force, than when without danger we are conversant with terrible objects, the mind always claiming to itself some part of the dignity and importance of the things which it contemplates. (50)

Similarly, Smith claims in his explanation of the origin of ranks that sympathy and ambition combine to ensure that one will "pursue riches and avoid poverty" (50), since only the latter will "draw upon him the attention of the world" and make "his heart . . . swell and dilate itself within him" (51). In both cases, sympathy, the sublime, and the desire to establish a relationship with equal or even "superior" men are expressed in language so similarly overdetermined that is impossible, I believe, to separate the strands in this complex of intrinsically social desires which, given the society in which Smith and Burke wrote, would clearly be limited to middle-class men.

The fact that sympathy, the sublime, and ambition are mutually-implicated phenomena raises an interesting set of issues that cannot fully be developed here, including the suggestion that through the sympathetic sublime, an androcentric and clearly public morality was actively being formed. This suggestion, in turn, has clear implications not only for traditional studies of the sympathetic imagination

in ethics and aesthetics, but also, I believe, for any theory of gender-identity which draws its evidence from that literature. At the very least, this form of sympathetic response casts a different light upon how one interprets the late-eighteenth century preoccupation with tragic pleasure. Whereas many critics have assumed, with Wasserman, that eighteenth-century theories of tragic pleasure turn upon "sympathy with the participants" of a tragic scene, it is also possible to argue that the victims of suffering are less important to the observing subject than the forces by which they are overwhelmed--any power, to borrow Wasserman's words, which "they do not control" (306). In the following section, I shall apply this argument to what one critic regards as Wordsworth's most "extreme experiment in pathos" (Averill 168), "The Thorn" (1798).

### "The Thorn"

"The Thorn," published in the Lyrical Ballads, has been a problematical work for critics, in part because, while everybody agrees that it is somehow related to the tradition of sympathy, no one is quite sure who, or what, is the subject of the poem, the person with whom the reader is supposed to sympathize. There are three central characters in "The Thorn": Martha Ray, a woman half-mad with suffering, who hovers around the spot where her baby is rumored to be buried; a retired sea captain, a "superstitious" person, writes Wordsworth, who relays the "story" of Martha Ray's life (the gossip upon which her life is presumed to be

based); and one of Wordsworth's wanderers, to whom Martha Ray's story is told. Yet, as James Averill points out, many recent critics, following Geoffrey Hartman, argue that the poem is actually about the imagination, about the way in which Martha Ray's story is filtered and re-shaped through the mind of the sea-captain, which may or may not be identified with Wordsworth's own (170n). Within this context, the sea captain--the "ocular man in Wordsworth," according to Hartman--is usually regarded as a kind of unfeeling or ineffectual spectator, as some kind of obsessive voyeur. It is only a short step from that characterization to James Averill's complete denunciation, which enables him to speak of the sea-captain's "ghoulishness," or his "morbid interest in human suffering" (173). Following this characterization and arguing, in addition, that the morbid imagination of the sea-captain approaches that of the sentimental artist, Averill concludes that "The Thorn" is Wordsworth's "most severe portrait of the sentimental artist and his audience" (180).

My own reading, in contrast to these, begins with the assumption that "The Thorn" is only peripherally about the aesthetics of spectatorship, the patho-sympathetic tradition, or any account of the imagination which focuses upon the importance of suffering. It is also and even primarily about the power of language to create, or to destroy, the bonds of sympathy within a community, which includes the relationship between the sea captain and Martha Ray, but which is not confined to them. The sea captain's voice, after all, is set

within a chorus of voices: the unnamed wanderer's, Martha Ray's, Farmer Simpson's, Steven Hill's, and finally, the community's, each, in turn, interpreting the scanty rumors of Martha Ray's history, determining the significance of the place to which she repairs, and seeking to establish the grounds of her guilt or innocence. Significantly, the collective voice of the community--"they say" or "some say"--competes with the sea-captain's for predominance. But only he, we are told, has seen Martha Ray up close, and only he, it appears, declines to denounce her. Thus the conflict between the community's almost univocal condemnation of the woman and the sea captain's faltering resistance to their rumoring constitutes the dramatic tension of this poem.

While I shall demonstrate these arguments momentarily, it is first important to outline the relationship between language and Wordsworth's representation of sympathy, upon which the entire reading turns. Burke had claimed that sympathy is central to art: it is "chiefly" by the principle of sympathy, he writes, "that poetry, painting, and other affecting arts, transfuse their passions from one breast to another, and are often capable of grafting a delight on wretchedness, misery, and death itself" (44). Like Burke, Wordsworth believed that sympathy is best mediated by language.<sup>11</sup> Thus in his Note to "The Thorn" he claims that one purpose of this poem is to elicit sympathy for the rustic narrator via his language, to "take care that words," he writes, "which in [such superstitious] minds are impregnated with passion, should likewise convey passion to readers who



are not accustomed to sympathize with men feeling in that manner or using such language" (LB 288). The ostensible purpose of this poem, then, is to expand the bounds of sympathy beyond its narrow parameters to include a different class of men. Yet precisely because, according to these writers, the possibility of sympathy and thus important social bonds are so closely allied to language, Wordsworth sometimes represents language as an active and almost independent force within the social realm. In the "Essay Upon Epitaphs," for example, Wordsworth makes the claim that language, in its connection with the possibility of sympathy, is the most influential force for good and evil within society itself. In perhaps the most often-quoted passage from this work, Wordsworth argues that "Words are too awful an instrument for good and evil to be trifled with":

they hold above all other external powers a  
dominion over thoughts. If words be not an  
incarnation of the thought, but only a  
clothing for it, then surely they will prove  
an ill gift; such as one of those poisoned  
vestments, read of in the stories of  
superstitious times, which had the power to  
consume and to alienate from his right mind  
the victim who put them on. Language, if it  
do not uphold, feed, and leave in quiet, is a  
counterspirit, unremittingly and noiselessly  
at work to derange, to subvert, to lay waste,  
to vitiate, and to dissolve. (Prose II: 84-5)

In this essay, Wordsworth treats language as an "external power," as "spirit" or "counterspirit." It is no longer (or not simply) a mediating term in the sympathetic relationship between men of different classes, but a force in its own right, somehow apart from the men who practice it. Thus detached from its explicitly communicative function, language (like any other "terrible power") may itself serve as a source of the sublime.

Wordsworth's comments in the "Essay Upon Epitaphs" are helpful in interpreting "The Thorn," a poem, which, much like the essay above, may be read as an allegory of how language functions for good or evil. Here language is represented as a destructive force. While the community's language works as "counterspirit" to "lay waste" the life of Martha Ray, the "superstitious" sea captain consistently resists that negative force, as is apparent in his descriptions of the unfortunate woman, and of the thorn tree with which, in his imagination, she is allied. Personifying the tree, he describes it as "a wretched thing forlorn" whose history, significantly, is also the subject of communal speculation.<sup>12</sup> According to the sea captain, the tree "looks so old,/ In truth you'd find it hard to say,/ How it could ever have been young,/ It looks so old and gray" (1-4). And like Martha Ray, it is subject to forces over which it has no control. Though it "stands erect" creeping mosses "clasp it round,"

So close, you'd say that they were bent  
With plain and manifest intent,  
To drag it to the ground;

And all had joined in one endeavor

To bury this poor thorn forever. (18-22)

As Albert Gerard notes, the thorn tree is an "emblem of a being overcome by the suffering inflicted by outside forces" (72) which simply suggests that Martha Ray, in being identified with the tree, is somehow a victim. But the sea-captain's description of the thorn tree is more explicit than Gerard's: it suggests, first, that these forces are almost intentional, which is to ascribe a human, as distinct from natural, agent to her suffering; second, it refers to a communal project ("and all had joined in one endeavor"). These negative and hostile forces are thus identifiable, if a bit obscure.

The destructive forces of communal language--or, more specifically, of the community's gossip and rumoring--are throughout the poem distinguished from the comparatively positive voice of the captain, who, as Wordsworth claims in the Note to "The Thorn" "was not a native" (LB 288). By virtue of his status as an outsider, the captain is automatically endowed with a separate voice which, within the poem proper, is meant to function in opposition to the damaging forces of communal language. Admittedly, this "opposition" is not immediately apparent. It is manifest, first, in the captain's reluctance to give into rumoring, and secondly, in his own comparatively compassionate account of Martha Ray's life. Unlike the others, he insists upon the limits of own understanding, even to the point of directing the wanderer away from hearsay back to the tree. When the

wanderer, for example, echoes the question that all seek to answer--"And wherefore does she cry? (86)--the sea captain insists that "the true reason no one knows" and points the wanderer to the thorn. The question is repeated, and the narrator, once again, disavows any real knowledge:

Nay rack your brain---'tis all in vain,  
I'll tell you all I know;  
But to the thorn, and to the pond  
Which is a little way beyond,  
I wish that you would go:  
Perhaps when you are at that place  
You something of her tale may trace. (104-10)

Yet he does eventually tell what he has heard, complete with commentary on the source of her suffering. It is significant, I believe, that he attributes her initial suffering to a perversion of language, or, more specifically, to a broken oath. She planned to be married to Stephen Hill,

And they had fixed the wedding day,  
The morning that must wed them both;  
But Stephen to another maid  
Had sworn another oath;  
And with this other maid to church  
Unthinking Stephen went. . . . (122-27)

After this betrayal, the sea captain indicates that Martha Ray is ostracized and blamed for her initial credulity. A "cruel, cruel, fire, they say,/ Into her bones was sent" (129-30). She is rumored to be with child ("'Tis said, a child was in her womb") and, within months, she is rumored to

be insane, as well. The narrator stops here to respond with compassion to the force of the story he narrates--"Oh me!" he cries, "ten thousand times I'd rather/ That he had died, that cruel father!" (143-44). But as the rest of his narration reveals, the community, in contrast, is increasingly subject to the effects of its own insidious rumors.

Where language works as counterspirit, hearsay quickly evolves into lurid accusation. Thus the stories surrounding Martha Ray are changed into "facts," and those "facts" into supernatural events. The sea captain reports tales of "living voices" from the mountaintop, "and others, I've heard many swear,/ Were voices of the dead" (173-74). Despite the fact that he is himself a superstitious man, he denies that any such voices could be connected with her: "I cannot think, whate'er they say,/ They had to do with Martha Ray" (175-76). Within the village, however, the woman has been cursed. When no baby materialized (as of course it would not) the village began to accuse her of murder.<sup>13</sup> "Some will say" that she hanged her baby; "some say" that she drowned it; but "each and all agree," he says, that the baby is buried beneath the moss. Having tried and found her guilty, then, upon the basis of their own fearful speculation, the community swears another oath, reminiscent, in effect, of "unthinking" Stephen Hill's. "And some had sworn an oath that she/ Should be to public justice brought" (232-33). Their hysterical plan to dig up the "baby's" bones is interrupted by another sign of communal hysteria, a story of supernatural intervention--the "beauteous hill of moss" is presumed to stir.

This "miracle," I believe, is meant to appear as another example of the way language, unleashed from benevolent intentions, "holds dominion over thoughts" only, says Wordsworth, "to derange." While Wordsworth describes the sea captain as "credulous and talkative," which makes him vulnerable to the gossip to which he is exposed, there is, in addition, clearly something of the sentimental hero in him, which resists the negative effect of the stories he is compelled to relate. When describing the spot around the thorn, for example, he employs the language of romance, a flowery hyperbole that always creeps into his speech when Martha Ray, and not the village gossip, is its subject.

All lovely colours there you see,  
 All colours that were ever seen,  
 And mossy network too is there,  
 As if by hand of lady fair  
 The work had woven been,  
 And cups, the darlings of the eye,  
 So deep is their vermillion dye. (39-44)

This somewhat fanciful description is particularly telling when placed against the community's account of the same place, which occurs towards the end of the poem. "I've heard," he says, repeating, now, the words of another, "That the scarlet moss is red/ With drops of that poor infant's blood" (221-22). While the narrator's increasingly impassioned language belies the force of those stories, he does not give into them: "But kill a new-born infant thus/ I do not think she could" (223-24). And as to whether or not

the "baby" is indeed buried beneath the moss, he refuses to hazard an interpretation: "I cannot tell how this may be" (243). The poem concludes with his pointing, yet again, to the thorn, now explicitly bound to the lonely cries of Martha Ray:

But plain it is, the thorn is bound  
 With heavy tufts of moss, that strive  
 To drag it to the ground.  
 And this I know, full many a time,  
 When she was on the mountain high;  
 By day, and in the silent night,  
 When all the stars shone clear and bright,  
 That I have heard her cry,  
 "Oh, misery! oh, misery!  
 Oh, woe is me, oh misery!" (244-253)

Through his stubborn adherence to the words of Martha Ray, and his equally stubborn refusal to accept all the lurid accusations in the tales he reports, the sea captain is able to discern--if not to articulate--the presence of "plain and manifest intent" in the rumors which circulate around him. Moreover, in his resistance to this intent, it could be argued that he, even more Martha Ray, should be associated with the thorn tree which "stands erect" against such insidious forces.

In any case, once his "superstition" and "impassioned language" is set against the hysterical gossip of the community itself, one can see how Wordsworth could regard the sea captain as a subject worthy of sympathetic response. The

ostensible purpose of the poem, as I have mentioned, is to create a bond between the sea captain and the reader, comparable to that between the sea captain and the wanderer. That Wordsworth was not entirely successful in this project, of course, is apparent in his comments in a letter to John Wilson, some two years after the poem was published, where he claims that the poem--among a certain class of people at least--was widely misunderstood. Here, he complains that some readers

are disgusted with the naked language of some of the most interesting passions of men, either because it is indelicate, or gross, or [vu]lgar, as many fine ladies could not bear certain expressions in The [Mad] Mother and the Thorn, and, as in the instance of Adam Smith, who we [are] told, could not endure the Ballad of Chym of the Clough, because the [au]thor had not written like a gentleman.

(Early Years 354-55)

For Wordsworth, sympathy is bound to language, and one's language, in turn, is dependent upon one's identification with a particular social class. In seeking to "expand" the bounds of sympathetic response from one class of men to another, Wordsworth is at his most social, an impulse for which he often praised.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, one might ask, what are the limits of this presumably progressive social vision? My reading of the poem so far, although it clarifies the status of the narrator,<sup>15</sup>



nevertheless leaves unresolved a problematical issue. If "The Thorn," as I have argued, is about the effects of language, and if the "impassioned" language of the captain, as Wordsworth insists, is meant to provoke "correspondence of feeling" in the reader, what, within this ethico-aesthetic economy, is the function of Martha Ray? One answer, of course, is that she is but another of the many females in distress with which the pages of sentimental writers are strewn, the source, in other words, of tragic pleasure with whom the sea captain (or the reader surrogate) is supposed to identify. Yet this reading of Martha Ray as a highly mediated kind of sentimental heroine is unsatisfactory because it does not take into account the place of the sublime in the poem proper, an aesthetic structure which actively discourages one from identification with pain. As we have seen in Burke, the "spectator" must identify with the source of power, and not with the one who suffers under it, so as to "claim" to himself "some portion of the dignity and importance of the thing it contemplates" (50). On this Wordsworth is in complete agreement with Burke, and even makes similar distinctions. As Wordsworth writes in his essay "On the Sublime and Beautiful," the sublime may be divided into two types, both of which require identification with power. "Power awakens the sublime either when it rouses us to a sympathetic energy & calls upon the mind to grasp at something . . . which it is incapable of attaining" or, when it produces "a humiliation or prostration of the mind before some external agency" so great that one "presumes not to

participate, but is absorbed in the might in the external power" (Prose II: 354). In order to supplement traditional readings of the poem, then, one must ask a simple question: what, in these poem, is the agent of suffering with which one is supposed to identify?

Clearly, neither Martha Ray nor the captain, according to these definitions, can serve as the source of the sublime. Yet the negative forces of language confronted by each--the invidious gossip of the community--can serve as that source, in so far as that language represents an agent of suffering beyond any individual's control. It is this morally negative power, I have suggested, which serves as the major topos of the poem, and is symbolized by the thorn tree which, according to the sea captain, struggles against it. The thorn, then, cannot finally be identified with any single character. It stands, instead, much like the poem, as a kind of monument to the seemingly inevitable suffering which "good" men such as the captain, the wanderer, or the reader, must resist even as they attempt to understand. Martha Ray, however, unlike the sea captain, can neither struggle against these forces nor gain the distance necessary to understanding them. In the poem proper, she is represented simply as a passive and relatively inarticulate testament to the power of language--to the very language, I would add, out of which Wordsworth's poem and the bonds it attempts to promote are constructed. In this sense, Martha Ray is represented as the "natural" source of a moral community from which she is displaced. To put it semiotically, within the ethico-

aesthetic economy of the sympathetic sublime, her function is to serve as the tangible embodiment of pain and suffering upon which the clearly androcentric pleasures of the sublime are founded.

In this analysis of the "The Thorn," the sublime emerges as a (largely) masculinist moral construct. Before going on, however, I want to be very careful about what I believe that means. It is "masculinist," I would argue, not because the sublime is egocentric, or that it is symptomatic of some imperious and intrinsically masculine attempt to "transcend" nature, females, or group activity in general. This is to speculate about its cause, when I am more interested in its purpose, contours, and possible effect. From this point of view, the sympathetic sublime as outlined here is masculinist simply because through its structures, exclusively masculine groups are simultaneously being formed. The sublime promotes a masculinist moral economy itself dependent upon the connection between the feminine and the "natural" embodiment of suffering and pain.<sup>16</sup> While such distinctions as I have tried to draw here may appear to be a too-subtle splitting of hairs, this shift from a genetic to a positivist interpretation has important implications, I believe, not only for criticism of the sublime, but also for criticism of women's writing, particularly as that is related to "feminine" models of models of morality. These implications will be introduced in the following section.

### Dorothy and Other Women

As I have already mentioned, one question that feminist critics have had to ask is why fewer texts by women writers show evidence of the sublime than texts by men. The most recent and in some ways most convincing response to this question is that women, have a different "social-structurally induced psychological mechanism" than men, that predisposes women to an "alternative" moral construct, characterized by a concern with relationships, the willingness and ability to care (Chodorow 207). This desire to locate a "separate sphere" of moral development in writing by women is especially apparent in the criticism on Dorothy Wordsworth, in which critics, drawing upon Chodorow's psycho-sexual account of moral development, look for proof of Dorothy's non-hierarchical relationships. Susan Wolfson, for example, writes of Dorothy's "poetics of community" (162) and Susan Levin, of her "dependence on and joy in a domestic life in nature" (1987, 73). Thus Dorothy's representations of women and nature are thought to be symptomatic of a feminine imagination, a feminine consciousness, and finally, a more "compassionate" feminine morality. Largely on this basis, Dorothy Wordsworth has recently been re-claimed as a prototype of feminine moral virtue, as a woman whose caring, nurturing qualities serve as a convenient foil for the masculinist self-aggrandizement of her brother William.<sup>17</sup>

There are several problems, however, with such an approach, three of which I would like to address here. First, as Nicholson and Fraser have already pointed out, Chodorow's

claim that women are distinguished from men in their "greater concerns with relational interaction" may "rest on an equivocation on the term relationship" (97). As I have attempted to show, the function of the sublime is not, or not simply, to "transcend" relationships, but, instead, to create them. In alliance with the discourse of sympathy, it functions to promote social bonds between already similar men. If there is a difference between "masculine" and "feminine" morality, then, that is manifest in one's representation of community, what needs to be addressed is not the fact of relationship, or its absence, but the contours of the relationships which are being promoted. To ignore or suppress the fact that the sublime works to create relationships--however public, self-aggrandizing, and androcentric those may be--may be to presuppose a "late twentieth-century concept" of that word, where the idea of "relationship" is limited mostly, if not exclusively, to "private" phenomena such as "intimacy, friendship, and love" (97). In mid-eighteenth century writing, as we have seen, the public/private dichotomy assumed in Chodorow's analysis was in the process of being formed, in part through the discourse of sympathy.

The suggestion that this discourse is always male-biased brings up a second problem with models of "masculine" and "feminine" moral development: the way that, in positing a single activity such as "mothering" to explain the differences between men and women, they obscure the formative or constitutive nature of ethico-aesthetic discourse itself.

Correspondingly, because critics following Chodorow are looking for positive evidence of a "feminine" moral disposition, they may obscure or simply overlook the subtle resistances that women such as Dorothy Wordsworth have mounted against male-biased ethico-aesthetic writing, and thus way women were forced to challenge these codes at the level of representation itself. One extended example of this resistance, I hope, will suffice. As "The Thorn" illustrates, vagrant women can serve as a vehicle for the sublime.<sup>18</sup> In that poem, Martha Ray is the victim of overwhelming forces with which, Wordsworth hopes, men as different as the sea captain and the "reader" will be able to identify. While Dorothy, in turn, is perfectly willing to represent women as victims of outside forces over which they have no control, she does not cast that representation into the sublime, where it serves to create such clearly masculinist bonds. Instead, she consistently employs the picturesque, where an absent visual center, thoroughly aware of its own descriptive powers, describes and organizes objects as those present themselves to memory (Davis).<sup>19</sup> The following journal entry is typical. Leaving Leadhills, Scotland, she and her brother come upon a woman "sitting right in the middle of the field, alone, wrapped up in a grey cloak or plaid": "She sat motionless all the time we looked at her, which might be nearly half an hour. We could not conceive why she sat there, for there were neither sheep nor cattle in the field; her appearance was very melancholy" (Journals I: 213). As they cross over the hill, the landscape, as she describes it,

begins to assume the same qualities as the woman. They spot "blasted" trees, she says, near a dilapidated cottage. "No doubt," she continues,

that woman had been an inhabitant of the cottage; however this might be, there was so much obscurity and uncertainty about her, and her figure agreed so well with the desolation of the place, that we were indebted to the chance of her being there for some of the most interesting feelings that we had ever had from natural objects connected with man in dreary solitariness. (Journals I: 213)

These "interesting feelings" are the sign, of course, of a highly refined aesthetic sensibility. Obscurity, desolation, and solitude, moreover, are all markers of the sublime. Yet rather than casting these emotions into a structure of power, Dorothy represents a single and highly controlled vision of nature, in which the woman and her surroundings provoke little but melancholy and an "interesting" mood.

The import of this aesthetic stance emerges in a journal entry written some twenty years later. Following a stream to the "gray torrent of the Lutschine," Dorothy and a party of travelers arrive at the basin of a cataract "where two women," she writes, "appeared before me singing a shrill and savage air:--"

. . . their tones were startling, and in connection with their wild yet quiet figures strangely combined with the sounds of dashing

water and the silent aspect of the huge crag  
 that seemed to reach the sky! (Journals II:  
 218)

While this scene is material for the sublime, Dorothy refuses to pursue this structure. Instead, in a lengthy footnote to this brief passage, she appends her brother's sonnet written in memory of this occasion, and a similar entry from Robert Southey's journal. In Wordsworth's poem, the poor and homeless women are mythologized, made into sirens who, in conjunction with nature, become objects of pleasure for men:

...no caverned Witch  
 Chaunting a love-spell ever intertwined  
 Notes shrill and wild with art more musical!  
 Alas! that from the lips of abject Want  
 And Idleness in tatters mendicant  
 They should proceed--enjoyment to enthrall  
 And with regret and useless pity haunt  
 This bold, this pure, this skyborn Waterfall!

(Journals II: 218n)

While it might be argued that Dorothy appends this sonnet in order to confirm the power of this sighting, its major purpose, I believe, is to demystify these women, to intervene in the process by which they are mis-represented. Thus while noting that both Southey and her brother characterize the women's tones as being "sweet" and "thrilling," Dorothy remarks, quite decisively, that "I was close to the women when they began to sing, and hence, probably it was that I perceived nothing of sweetness in their tones" (Journals 2:



218n). And while noting that both Southey and her brother report seeing three women, Dorothy insists that there were but two. "Observe," she writes at the end of her note, "I heard only two singers; but the powerfulness of their tones was perfectly astonishing--and as Mr. Southey says, 'it was not a song of articulate sounds'" (Journals II: 218n).

"Astonishment," according to Dorothy's own definition, is "an overwhelming sense of the powers of nature for the destruction of all things, of the helplessness of man" (Journals II: 128). According to Burke's, it is "that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended with some degree of horror" (57). In both cases, astonishment is a signpost of the sublime; it marks the presence of an overpowering or overwhelming force, or the effect of that force upon the spectator. The difference, however, between these two definitions is that Dorothy's simply notes the "sense" of destructive forces in nature, while the Burkean sublime prescribes that one "identify" or sympathize with those powers so as to turn the suffering of others to one's own personal gain. Instead of participating in the male-bonding here, Dorothy devotes her energies to undermining the self-serving and highly "literary" accounts perpetuated by the men around her, each of whom had represented these two real women as three charming muses whose "inarticulate" suffering prompts "enjoyment to enthrall."<sup>20</sup> While it is perhaps not wise to make too much of Dorothy Wordsworth's footnote, the absence of the sublime is significant, I believe, not simply because it denotes a lack of poetic

imagination, or simply because it denotes a positive and "feminine" moral sensibility, but because, given the context outlined here, it may signify a localized refusal to enter into the masculinist economy of pleasure, pain, and power upon which the sympathetic sublime is based.<sup>21</sup>

The suggestion that women are capable of resisting a largely hegemonic cultural discourse, in turn, raises a third problem with using psychoanalytic theory to analyze ethical language. Ethical language always operates through binaries. This means that early feminists and female moralists, forced to confront the binary structure of the language of sympathy, and the hierarchy of values within it, had a limited number of choices. Yet these were pursued in often complicated and even contradictory ways. I believe it to be significant, for example, that conservative eighteenth-century writers such as Hannah More told women that there were three modes of writing to which they should not aspire. "The lofty epic, the pointed satire, and the more daring and successful flights of the tragic muse," she writes, "should be "reserved for the bold adventures of the other sex" (Works II: 334). Clearly, More's comment is prescriptive; she hopes to promote a gender-specific morality, where the behaviors and values of men are carefully and purposefully distinguished from those of women. As she continues, "the sublime, the nervous, and the masculine, characterize their compositions, as the beautiful, the soft, and the delicate, mark those of the others" (Works II: 335). At the same time, however, Hannah More's prescriptions must not be taken as representative of women,

or even of an age. Other and generally more radical female writers who desired to include women in the "family of man" were actively drawing upon the language of the sublime to suit their own ends. Mary Wollstonecraft clearly does so in the following description from her Norwegian letters: "The contemplation of noble ruins produces a melancholy that exalts the mind."--

We take a retrospect of the exertions of man,  
the fate of empires and their rulers; and  
marking the grand destruction of ages, it  
seems the necessary change of time leading to  
improvement.--Our very soul expands, and we  
forget our littleness; how painfully brought  
to our recollection by such vain attempts to  
snatch from decay what is destined so soon to  
perish. (71)

These lines could easily have been written by a Thompson, a Burke, or Wordsworth, all of whom were also actively involved in advocating programs for social reform. Because the sublime encourages identification with a principle of power, one can see why this mode of writing would appeal to Wollstonecraft, while being anathema to conservative Christians such as Hannah More. The suggestion is that one should be very careful about attributing some "masculine" or "feminine" moral disposition to a body of literature in which such associations, far from having been formed, were actively being organized and/or contested upon explicitly political grounds.

This discussion of sympathy, gender, and the sublime thus opens up to a much larger issue. What happens to psychoanalytic readings of "masculine" and "feminine" moral sensibilities when those are revealed to be actively promoted by a male-biased moral discourse, dependent upon a gender-specific morality? What happens to ideas regarding woman's "different voice" when that is regarded as a necessary part of competing masculinist ethico-aesthetic structures, by which, I would argue, women were already inscribed? These questions, of course, are loaded: insofar as they posit a pervasive and male-biased ethical discourse, however complicated that may be, they are antithetical to critics who desire, for their own reasons, to locate and valorize a peculiarly "feminine" moral realm. There are, of course, good reasons to do that, not the least of which, as Janet Todd has pointed out, is that the "extreme value placed on Romantic poetry" by F.R. Leavis and others is "allied to a downgrading of women's prosaic activity" during the same period (1988, 112). But precisely because psychoanalytic criticism does not presume to analyze the history of value-formation, it is more likely than any other methodology to duplicate, unknowingly, the male-biased structures of value which, I would argue, characterize Western philosophical, aesthetic, and moral writing itself.

We can see this troublesome continuity in the examples above. Although few feminists would agree with Hume and Smith that the association between compassion and women is a "natural" one--that it is a fact of female biology--it is

possible to argue that their near-biological essentialism has been replaced with accounts of "gender identity" which implicitly rely upon a similar "quasi metanarrative" of feminine moral development (Fraser and Nicholson 95).<sup>22</sup> Given their reliance upon some "masculine" or "feminine" model of development to explain the sublime--or to explain its absence--Weiskel, Homan, Wolfson, and Levin are all involved in promoting (and obscuring) a kind of "cultural" essentialism not, in the end, so different from More's. Wolfson and Levin, for example, unknowingly duplicate not only More's perception of the sublime, but also her prescriptive intent--to "legitimize" some presumably "feminine" morality in opposition to some presumably "egocentric" and thus masculine moral construct.<sup>23</sup> This, unfortunately, is simply to invert the hierarchy of values by which women were defined, without, at the same time, either examining or challenging their construction.

The assumption that gender-specific moralities are historically-situated and constructed phenomena does not, however, mean that their construction is either simple, monocausal, or predictable. As we have seen, the ethics and aesthetics of sympathy associate the "feminine" with a principle of suffering without at the same time endowing women with any real historical specificity. Paradoxically, this lack of specificity may have helped create an opening for women moralists who, shaping the language of sympathy to their own ends, sought to organize "feminine" moralities in ways that--directly or indirectly--could subvert, revise, or

simply transcend the hierarchy of values apparent in the writing of men. Because such compensatory strategies, as one might expect, were neither self-identical nor self-consistent, it makes little sense to speak of a "feminine" morality apart from the conditions of its production, and apart from the writers who were responsible for particular representations. In Part Two, I shall demonstrate this point through analyzing the writing of Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More.

## Notes to Chapter Two

1. "Literary" is placed in quotation marks here because, as Raymond Williams (1977) points out, the modern concept of "literature" as a highly-valued body of writing that is somehow different from more "actual" or "practical" works did not emerge until the late-eighteenth century and was not fully developed until the nineteenth century. This is an important issue for anyone concerned with the interpretation of values and value-formation. Consequently, as a matter of critical practice, I prefer the more historical term "letters" over "literature."

2. With the exception of Bate (1945) and Monk, relatively few eighteenth-century critics have analyzed the relationship between sympathy, pleasure, pain, and the sublime. While this may be attributed to the popular notion that the sublime is a "romantic" phenomenon, it is important to remember that Burke published his treatise on the sublime and the beautiful in 1757, two years prior to The Theory of Moral Sentiments. Before the turn of the century, moreover, James Beattie, Hugh Blair, Alexander Gerard, Richard Payne Knight, Archibald Alison, and scores of others had followed suit (see Monk).

3. Other important accounts of the sublime based upon psychoanalytic models include Weiskel and Morris, both of whom--in perhaps quite different ways--rely upon Freud. This chapter, in contrast, draws upon a second tradition of writing on the sublime as an intrinsically social or even political mode of writing, a notion which is most systematically set forth by Schiller. In addition, see Wilkinson and Willoughby, who provide the best introduction to Schiller's aesthetics--or, more precisely, to his idea of the "Aesthetic State" (xi-cxcv). On the politics of the sublime, see also Shapiro.

4. Following Gilbert and Gubar, Margaret Homan sought to articulate a separate tradition of women's writing set against the "phallogocentric" literature of the sublime, where, she argues, women such as Dorothy Wordsworth were required to assume a "secondary and peripheral role" and to "omit a central or prominent self" in their writing (Homan 73).

5. For a useful discussion of the relationship between literary criticism, romanticism, and the representation of gender, see Todd 1988, 110-117.

6. On the relationship between sympathy and tragic response in sentimental literature, see Wasserman and Crane. On sympathy and tragic response in anti-sensibility literature, or in what has been called the "anti-theatrical tradition," see Marshall 1986, 167-192; Marshall 1988; Cohen. On tragedy and the sublime, see Albrecht 1-24. As these categories exemplify, and as these critics have illustrated at length, the relationship between sympathy, tragedy, and the sublime

was throughout the eighteenth century a source of great controversy and debate. Rather than entering that debate, I shall focus upon one aspect of the larger problem: the way these three terms are united by a principle of pleasure that characterizes aesthetics as a whole.

7. Here Addison alludes to the idea that distance, either physical or psychological, is necessary for the aesthetic experience to occur. On the problem of aesthetic distantiation, see Stolnitz 1961b; Ogden; Bullough; and Fabricant.

8. Burke's admission that people take pleasure in the actual suffering of others is undoubtedly related to that fact that in the mid-eighteenth century crowds of people flocked to hangings and other scenes of public punishment. As he continues, "Chuse a day on which to represent the most sublime and affecting tragedy we have; appoint the most famous actors; spare no cost upon the scenes and the decoration; unite the greatest efforts of poetry, painting, and music; and when you have collected your audience, just at the moment when their minds are erect with expectation, let it be reported that a state criminal of high rank is on the point of being executed in the adjoining square; in a moment the emptiness of the theatre would demonstrate the comparative weakness of the imitative arts, and proclaim the triumph of the real sympathy" (47). On the relationship between sympathy and punishment, see McGowan.

9. As Morris correctly points out, "there is no essence of the sublime" (300). In this sense, it is very much like the figure of sympathy. What follows, then, is an analysis of the points in the writing of Wordsworth and Burke at which the logic of sympathy as I have outlined it and the structure of the sublime intersect with one another. I do not claim that this analysis can be extended beyond the writers here.

10. See Swartz on the relationship between ambition and the sublime, although he does not address the importance of sympathy in this context.

11. In his analysis of poetic language, Burke had argued against Locke and others that, since words have no resemblance to the "ideas for which they stand," poetry and rhetoric operate "chiefly by substitution; by the means of sounds, which by custom have the effect of realities" (173). The "business" of poetry and rhetoric, he claims, "is to affect rather by sympathy...; to display rather the effect of things on the mind of the speaker, or of others, than to present a clear idea of the things themselves (172). In this sense sympathy is central not only to an expressivist theory of art, but to the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and others in Germany. See Gadamer 153-87.

12. All references to "The Thorn" are taken from Lyrical Ballads, eds. Brett and Jones.



13. I realize, of course, that in calling the existence of this "baby" into question, I am denying a long tradition of criticism that assumes, in Byron's words, that the subject of "The Thorn" is "the remorse of an unnatural mother for the destruction of a natural child." It should be pointed out, however, that Byron's reference to the subject of the poem is within a longer complaint about Wordsworth's "prosaic raving" in the preface. Byron's full remark, which may, in fact, be a deliberate misrepresentation, is "In a note or preface (I forget which) by Mr. W. Wordsworth to a poem, the Subject of which, as far it is intelligible, is the remorse of an unnatural mother for the destruction of a natural child" etc. (see the preface to Don Juan). Neither here nor in the poem proper is there any reason to believe that the child existed anywhere outside the community's imagination.

14. As Wordsworth writes elsewhere, "[It] is not enough for me as a poet, to delineate merely such feelings as all men do sympathize with but, it is also highly desireable to add to these others, such as all men may sympathize with, and such as there is reason to believe they would be better and more moral beings if they did sympathize with" (Early Letters 358). On the relationship between Wordsworth, sympathy, and the poor, see Sampson and Simpson 160-184.

15. It should be said, in passing, that it also clarifies a problem in Wordsworth scholarship. It is well known that Wordsworth saw an actual thorn tree while walking with his ward, Basil Montagu, and determined to write a poem about it. It is also well known that Martha Ray was the mother of Basil Montagu, who in 1779 was murdered by a jealous lover. As Averill has noted, this trial received an inordinate amount of publicity. Yet more than one critic, believing the poem to be about a sea captain, a vagrant, or a thorn tree, has commented that "it is completely inexplicable why Wordsworth should have chosen the name of his friend's unfortunate mother to be the heroine of the poem" (LB 291). When the poem is regarded, as it has been here, as an allegory about the destructive powers of public rumor, scandal, and gossip--which, in turn, an individual may somehow resist--"The Thorn" emerges in a different light: as a would-be vindication, however partial, of the infamous Martha Ray.

16. This idea is closely related to Irigaray's concept of a "hom(m)o-social economy" where a woman "enters into" social, cultural, and economic exchanges "only as the object of a transaction, unless she agrees to renounce the specificity of her sex, whose 'identity' is imposed on her according to models that remain foreign to her. Women's social inferiority is reinforced and complicated by the fact that woman does not have access to language, except through recourse to 'masculine' systems of representation which disappropriate her from her relation to herself and to other women" (85). See also Sedgwick.

17. Central to many of these arguments for a superior "feminine" morality set against the "masculine" sublime is the assumption that in romantic writing, a disregard for nature and an appropriation of the "feminine" are equated. Mellor, for example, claims that the sublime and the poets who promote it "endorsed a concept of the self as a power that gains control over and gives significance to nature, a nature troped in their writings as female. They thus legitimized the continued repression of women and at the same time gave credence to the historically emerging capitalist belief in the primacy of the individual over the group" (8). Richardson expands upon this argument, asserting, in addition, that in order to claim "emotional intensity and intuition as male prerogatives" Romantic poets appropriate, assimilate, or incorporate feminine qualities (15). In both cases, the equation between certain "feminine" qualities and "nature"--itself a complicated romantic construct--is simply appropriated for anti-masculinist arguments. This seems to be a widespread trend in romantic criticism. Half of the articles in Romanticism and Feminism, significantly, quote Chodorow or Gilligan approvingly. See n. 21 and 22.

18. Examples include "The Vagrant Woman" in LB, itself taken from Adventures on Salisbury Plain (1793); "The Mad Mother" from LB; and "The Ruined Cottage."

19. See also Nabholz for a more traditional account of Dorothy and the aesthetics of the picturesque.

20. I do not mean to suggest that Dorothy's response to the discourse of sympathy is purely resistant. Like many eighteenth-century writers, she bought into the conservative idea that women should define themselves in terms of public service, which is simply to form different kinds of relationships than those encouraged for men. As Susan Wolfson has noted, Dorothy Wordsworth was active in any number of community projects. In fact, she defines herself in terms of her compassionate qualities: "my only merits," she writes, "are my devotedness to those I love and I hope a charity towards all mankind" (Middle Letters I: 525).

21. There are several explanations for this, none of which can be reduced to the notion of some pre-existent feminine moral sensibility, though each is undoubtedly implicated in the historical formation of that idea. It is important to remember, for example, that Dorothy, unlike William, was constantly aware of her own precarious position as a dependent sister. In this sense, she was little more than a brother's whim away from being one of the many homeless and vagrant women who populate her journals and poems. While this awareness rarely emerges in what we could identify as "compassion," it does seem to be manifest in structures of sympathy which differ from her brother's, in structures which allow both distance and control, without at the same time turning what must have been the very real pain of other women into material for the sympathetic sublime.

22. Most prominent among these theorists is Chodorow, who, in an effort to understand why women willingly take part in social practices which serve to maintain their status as the social inferiors of men, examines the causes and effects of "mothering" from a psychological perspective. (See n. 17). Chodorow argues that the fact that women are the primary caretakers of children gives rise to a different sense of self in boys and girls. Whereas girls are thought to define themselves in terms of their ability to relate to others, boys are not. From a post-structuralist feminist perspective, the problems with this approach are manifold. As Linda Nicholson and others have pointed out, in its positing of a single activity to "explain" the differences between the behaviors of men and women, not only does Chodorow's theory have "clear metanarrative overtones" (95), but in so far as it relies upon the "idea of a cross-cultural, deep sense of self, specified differently for men and women" (96) it ignores or at least suppresses the culturally-specific and historically-determined differences between individual men and women themselves. And this, concludes Nicholson, "is to risk projecting the socially dominant conjunctions" of one's own society onto others, "thereby distorting important features of both" (98). I shall return to Chodorow's significance in the conclusion of this study.

23. Chodorow claims that her description of the moral development of females is not meant to be prescriptive (215). In practice, however, it certainly is, as is apparent by the way Gilligan and her followers have valorized what they call "non-repressive" relationships between self and others, which are presumed to be characterized by women. This tendency to politicize psycho-sexual models of development is particularly apparent in French feminism, which, some have argued, exemplifies a "feminine" sublime. For an interesting exchange about this problem within a contemporary context, see Yæger, who claims that "French feminists" and others have created a "horizontal sublime" that "refuses an oedipal, phallic fight to the death with the father, but expands towards others" (191); and Edelman, who, after considering the "theoretically regressive" aspects of a contemporary feminine sublime, concedes that in its "gestures of empowerment" this mode of writing constitutes an "historically and politically imperative" moment in feminist theory and politics" (222).

## **Part Two: Early Feminism and Sympathetic Response**

The world cannot be seen by an unmoved  
spectator, we must mix in the throng, and  
feel as men feel before we can judge of  
their feelings. Wollstonecraft, A  
Vindication of the Rights of Woman

### Chapter Three: The Female Body Politic

In the first half of this study, I demonstrated how the discourse of sympathy functions to create bonds between presumably virtuous men, bonds from which women were excluded. This analysis, for reasons I have already addressed, was intentionally removed from any extended discussion of specific social practices. In order to highlight the political nature of moral discourse--the way in which "masculine" and "feminine" moral dispositions are always matters of conflicting but purposeful representation--I shall employ the same strategy here. In the two or three decades before the turn of the century, sympathy emerged as a key term in debates about the French Revolution, about British radicalism, and, I shall illustrate, about the "natural" position of women in social and political life. In these highly-charged and volatile arguments, the gender-specific subtext of sympathy underlying Wordsworth and Smith is made explicit, particularly in the writing of Rousseau, Wollstonecraft, Hays, and More. At the same time, however, there was a new or at least different emphasis upon the nature and value of the female body as a potential source of moral disorder, or, in the writing of Wollstonecraft and More, as a source of moral reform. My goal in Part Two of this study is to locate those structures as they make their way into feminist theory and practice where, arguably, they

remain today. In order to do this, I shall focus in this chapter upon one issue--the relationship between compassion, politics, and popular representations of the female body. My specific purpose is to establish the relationship between compassion, the female body, and the "moral value" of women as an explicitly political issue, not only to male moralists, but to early feminists, as well.

This particular configuration radiates in many directions. As I have already mentioned, throughout the eighteenth century medical writers were mapping out the central nervous system, or the "sympathetic system," in different ways for men than for women.<sup>1</sup> A burgeoning psychology, for example, had identified the female nervous system as being "innately" more susceptible to emotional disorders and thus constitutionally less capable of withstanding outside forces. As Todd points out, "Women were thought to express emotions with their bodies more sincerely and spontaneously than men; hence their propensity to crying, blushing and fainting. At the same time, such a susceptible organism could easily become erratic and deranged" (Todd 1986, 19).<sup>2</sup> For obvious reasons, this strange wedding between medicine and morality cannot be regarded as an objective and value-free feat of medical science. Similarly, it is possible to see an equally male-biased inscription of women in eighteenth-century moral theory. Hume, Smith, and (as I shall demonstrate) Rousseau all represent compassion as a physical, involuntary, or automatic form of sympathetic response. In so doing, they are following a popular signification. Johnson's Dictionary, as I

have mentioned, defines "compassion" as a special case of sympathetic response, as "painful sympathy" over which, presumably, one has little control.<sup>3</sup> The fact that "having bowels" is a popular synonym for compassion illustrates this point rather graphically (see Dictionary). On the other hand, each of these moralists explicitly attributes this form of sympathetic response to women, which is to shape a (presumably) value-neutral association to their own ends. As Kathryn Pauley Morgan has demonstrated, one of the many ways moral philosophers have denied women full moral agency is by representing them as "negative moral epiphenomenalists," or as creatures whose bodies act upon the mind so as to occlude appropriate moral feeling (150). Only through this complicated sleight of hand are the British moralists able both to insist upon the value of compassion, and to ensure that their own carefully cultivated moral qualities be regarded as "naturally" superior.<sup>4</sup>

This doctrine of separate virtues, the hierarchy of value into which that was cast, and the fact that both of those were being "naturalized" by eighteenth-century ethics, aesthetics, and medicine together thus serve as the starting point for mid-eighteenth century female writers, most of whom were determined to solidify, clarify, and elevate woman's moral value. Within that context, generally speaking, any female moralist is faced with one of two choices. First, she can insist (with Smith) upon woman's "natural" compassion, and promote "private" virtues at the expense of "public" ones. This is to invert the hierarchy of values intrinsic to

Smith's text, while maintaining the difference by which men and women are defined. As I will discuss in the following chapter, this is the option adopted by the conservative Christian Hannah More, who sought to promote what she believed to be were the best interests of women by keeping the "society of the sexes" intact. The problems with this approach are myriad, but the most immediate one is that while women, by virtue of their compassionate qualities, are endowed with moral value, they are not--outside of particular forms of Christianity--at the same time endowed with moral judgment.

The equation between compassion and women thus has real political implications. Within the more secularized systems of Hume and Smith, as we saw in Chapter II, indiscriminate compassion for others precludes one from identifying with the impartial spectator, and thus from internalizing moral authority. In relegating compassion to women, then, Hume, Smith, and others were simultaneously reinforcing her social and moral status as what Wollstonecraft will later call a "lovely trembler," as a creature both too threatened and too threatening to be granted civil existence (Rights of Woman 61). Given this, it is not surprising that radical feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays should question the association between compassion and feminine virtue. The other option, which they exemplify, is to de-naturalize the association between "compassion" and womanhood so as to undermine the basis for women's so-called ethical inferiority and their subsequent political exclusion.



In order to demonstrate the intimate relation between the writing of sympathy and early feminist politics, I shall begin at an unlikely place, with Rousseau's Julie, or, The New Heloise. This so-called "sensibility" novel, like much of the writing we have already seen, draws upon the discourse of sympathy to promote and justify the ethical and political power of the middle-class male. Yet Rousseau casts the logic of sympathy into a myth of social origin, also apparent in the novel, where Julie, the female protagonist, is represented as a necessary but dangerous source of compassion which must be suppressed for the greater good of the state. In the section which follows, I shall demonstrate how Wollstonecraft's early works--Mary, A Fiction (1788) and Thoughts on the Education of Daughters (1787)--are attempts to de-naturalize the association between women and unthinking compassion, in part by attributing women's "inferior" morality to her inadequate moral and religious education. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to analyzing A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), where I shall focus upon three interrelated issues: Wollstonecraft's reliance upon a rational religion to qualify the inherited association between women and "exquisite humanity"; her attempt to broaden the notions of "fellow-feeling" to include women, as well; and her desire to ground the moral value of women by appealing to the notion of "rational motherhood," which, she will argue, promotes more fundamental social bonds than those celebrated by middle-class men.

### Pity and Radical Politics: Rousseau

Rousseau is important to any discussion of Wollstonecraft because like her, as Cora Kaplan points out, "Rousseau wished to harness his gender ideologies to radical social and political theories" (39).<sup>5</sup> It is possible to see this desire in the plot of The New Heloise.<sup>6</sup> This novel tells the story of an ill-fated relationship between Julie, the daughter of an aristocrat, and her middle-class tutor, St. Preux. Throughout the novel, the essentially noble man will learn to control his passion for Julie, to join the company of "good" men such as Wolmar and Lord Bomston, and to take his rightful place as a responsible and respected citizen in the public world who knows the "value of a beneficent heart" (195). Julie, too, has a lesson to learn. Under the rule of her rational husband Wolmar, she learns the value of "private" virtues--chastity and maternal affection. As Rousseau has the reformed Julie ask of St. Preux:

Do you remember that, while reading your Plato's Republic, we once disputed the point of the moral difference between the sexes? I persist in the opinion which I had then and cannot imagine one common model of perfection for two different beings. . . . Besides, the purposes of nature not being the same in each sex, its inclinations, perceptions, and sentiments must be directed according to its own views; opposite tastes and constitutions are required for tilling the soil and for

nursing children. . . . The souls of a perfect woman and a perfect man must not resemble each other more than their appearance. Our vain imitations of your sex are the height of folly; they make wise men laugh at us and they discourage love. (108)

Each, then, learns his or her moral duty, how to serve best within his or her allotted "sphere." At the same time, these gender-specific and seemingly natural virtues are represented as being central to the future of a better world than the one symbolized by Julie's corrupt father.

In both this novel and Emile, Rousseau outlines separate duties for men and women which should, he claims, be inculcated by different "moral" educations. While his portrayal of these undoubtedly constitutes a significant moment in anti-feminist literature, instead of focusing upon this clearly didactic aspect of the novel, as so many feminist critics have already done,<sup>7</sup> I want to outline, briefly, how he uses the discourse of sympathy to underwrite that explicitly political agenda. In order to do that, it is helpful to place the novel within the context of Rousseau's more overtly political writing.

In his Discourse on Inequality, Rousseau lays out a myth of social origins in which pity, or compassion, is a central term.<sup>8</sup> Against Hobbes, but with Hume and Smith, Rousseau claims that "pity" is a disposition "so natural that even beasts sometimes give perceptible signs of it":

Without speaking of the tenderness of mothers

for their young and of the perils they brave  
to guard them, one observes daily the  
repugnance of horses to trample a living body  
underfoot. (130)

Yet as Derrida has noted, it is largely by virtue of the mother-child metaphor that this presumably universal and primitive form of relationship is connected with women, and women, in turn, are connected with nature (Derrida 173). As Rousseau continues, "in the state of nature," pity "takes the place of laws, morals, and virtue, with the advantage that no one is tempted to disobey its gentle voice" (133). While Rousseau's may appear to be a positive account of pity, and thus a positive account of the women who were thought to embody it, it is important to remember that his compassionate Mother/nature serves both a positive and negative role: while it protects men from one another in their infancy, it simultaneously threatens a "higher" law of nature, which is that women must obey men (Derrida 175-76). Thus Rousseau's larger purpose in the Discourse on Inequality is to argue that "institutional law," or what is represented as masculine moral authority, should replace this presumably natural and definitely feminized trait (Derrida 173).

Rousseau's myth of social origins is allegorized, I believe, in The New Heloise. Through carefully employing the language of sympathy, Rousseau reveals that St. Preux and Julie see their relationship in ways that not only reflect some "natural" moral difference, but which provide the terms by which St. Preux's struggle is to be read. In the height of

his passion, for example, St. Preux draws upon the discourse in writing to his aristocratic female charge: "Sometimes I dare to flatter myself," he asserts, "that heaven has brought about a secret sympathy in our affections, as well as in our tastes and our ages. . . . Before having acquired the standard prejudices of the world, we have some similar ways of feeling and seeing" (26). In this context, sympathy functions to signify some "natural" equality between members of two different classes. In so far as it calls into question "the standard prejudices of the world," it is a progressive trope which serves to subvert the legitimacy of Julie's powerful but morally corrupt father. Julie's vision of "mutual sympathy," however, involves more than "some similar ways of thinking and seeing." Indeed, in contrast to her lover's, it represents an almost physical sense of connection:

Our souls touch, so to speak, at all points and we feel an entire coherence. (Correct me, my friend, if I am poorly applying your lessons in physics.) Fate may indeed separate us, but not disunite us. We shall henceforth have only mutual pleasures and mutual pains; and like those magnets of which you were telling me that have, it is said, the same movements in different places, we should have the same sensations though we were at two poles of the earth. (47)

It is this desire for interconnection that throughout the

novel St. Preux will struggle to overcome.

In so far as Julie represents some original and physical desire for interconnection, she cannot be regarded as a character in her own right. Instead she serves as the attractive but dangerous sensibility which threatens to subvert St. Preux's rightful duties to society and to the state. It is significant, for example, that Julie gives herself to St. Preux not out of love--and certainly not out of active passion--but out of openness to his pain: "He would rush toward me in the impetuosity of a blind passion," she writes,

But he would stop himself suddenly; an insurmountable barrier seemed to have surrounded me, never to be overcome by his impetuous but chaste love. I dared watch this dangerous spectacle too much. I myself was troubled by his fits of passion. His sighs oppressed my heart. I shared his torments when I thought I was only pitying them. I saw him trembling with emotion, ready to lose consciousness at my feet. Perhaps love alone would have saved me; oh my cousin, it is pity that destroyed me. (78)

Despite the fact that Julie's presumable natural pity is temporarily channeled into more appropriate behaviors, eventually her unthinking response to the emotions of others does indeed serve to "destroy" her, as she sacrifices her life to save the life of her child (395). Even in the end,

moreover, her fantasies of connection are not controlled, but simply displaced from the social world. "The virtue which separated us on earth," she writes to St. Preux, "will unite us in the eternal dwelling" (407). St. Preux, on the other hand, has learned to distinguish benevolism from pity, which is clearly represented as a "weakness"; in the words of Lord Bomston, it is a form of mere self-interest, or "a concern for justice and order which desires everyone to be disposed of in the manner most advantageous to himself and society" (163). Once this negative social force is effectively overcome, St. Preux can look forward to inheriting Julie's children, marrying her friend, and becoming a father in his own right.

Like so many of the works we have seen, then, this novel turns upon the idea that pity and compassion are seductive but dangerous qualities which must be "perfected" by the greater society, or directed toward some appropriate end. All three writers take as their starting point the universality of pity or compassion. "The greatest ruffian," writes Smith, "the most hardened violator of the laws of society is not altogether without it" (TMS 9). This apparently positive virtue, however, is eventually associated with women, where it actually serves to "prove" their moral inferiority, a "natural" response to others that men, they argue, must learn to overcome. Thus claiming that compassion is an unmanly quality, Hume and Smith, as we have seen, react against an unthinking ethic--against one which encourages the ability to identify with another's weakness or suffering. Rousseau, in

turn, reinforces the association between women and compassion by representing it as a "primitive" and inevitably "feminine" need for connection that, paradoxically, both protects and threatens a higher law, the civil duty of men. In each case, compassion is represented as a volatile, even dangerous quality which must be controlled--"repressed" writes Julie--so that, like Hume and Smith, Rousseau builds his society upon qualities attributed to women who are now, consequently, excluded.

Yet there is a difference between Rousseau and the British moralists. The seemingly more "radical" Rousseau, rather than simply delineating the superiority of individual "self-command," represents masculine virtue as the end product of a long and difficult struggle against threatening and pre-existent forces in the state. This struggle, in turn, is always cast as a battle between men and women. As he writes in the Letter to D'Alembert, "an inverted domestic order is the paradigm of violence and political anomaly," where women, he claims, "no longer willing to tolerate separation,"

unable to make themselves into men . . . make  
us into women. This disadvantageous result  
which degrades man is very important  
everywhere; but it is especially so in a  
state like ours, whose interest is to prevent  
it. Whether a monarch governs men or women  
ought to be rather indifferent to him,  
provided that he be obeyed; but in a  
republic, men are needed. (177)



"In a republic, man are needed"--the suggestion, of course, is that women are not, except in so far as they represent a protective and threatening force which men, to prove their moral worth, must struggle to control.

Given the ongoing alliance between the discourse of sympathy and sexual and party politics, it should be apparent that at issue in this mid-century work is not so much the status of the novel as "sensibility" or "anti-sensibility" literature, but how, through the representation of masculine and feminine "sensibilities," social relationships are being re-formed.<sup>9</sup> To put it another way, at stake in The New Heloise is not simply some romantic liaison, but the promises of individualism, which are embodied in the tumultuous but eventually successful career of St. Preux. Julie, in turn, is little more than the too-responsive text from which the erstwhile tutor draws his hard-learned lesson. In casting her this way, Rousseau both reinforces the idea that women possess a secondary and inferior moral power, and softens that inferiority by appealing to a favorite eighteenth-century theme: that women, while themselves slaves of compassion, may serve as moral agents by effecting another's moral elevation. Thus Julie's status as moral heroine, unlike St. Preux's, is inherently problematical, and subject to debate throughout that century and into our own.

That debate, as I have indicated, usually turns upon whether or not "compassion" or "suffering" is regarded as a valuable feminine trait, even while the systems through which those values were written were and still are constantly in

flux. Certainly there is little question in the case of Clarissa, who serves as Julie's prototype. As John Mullan has commented à propos of Clarissa, she "values her capacity for 'suffering'," which signifies both her susceptibility to others and the moral resolution which controls it: "the school of affliction," she writes, is "an excellent school . . . in which we are taught to know ourselves, to be able to compassionate and bear with one another, and look up to a better hope" (64). In the newly-secularized political visions of mid-eighteenth-century philosophers, however, compassion is represented as a hopelessly inadequate response to a changing world.

From this point of view, it is easy to see why compassion was such an important term for early feminist writers, many of whom, writing in direct response to Rousseau, sought to undermine the dangerous association between women and unthinking pity. The Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796), for example, may be regarded as a virtual re-writing of The New Heloise from a moderate feminist's point of view. Like The New Heloise, Hays' novel describes the danger of "pity [that] melted the soul to love" for Emma and for Harley, the secretly-married man who, unfortunately, she comes to adore (79). Yet unlike Julie, Hays' heroine is represented as a free moral agent, as a thinking person who realizes on her own that her errors are "the offspring of sensibility" (xviii)--the product of indiscriminate feeling. Significantly, Hays suggests that this indiscriminate feeling had been promoted by Emma's reading of Rousseau. This

"dangerous, enchanting" novel, says Emma, prompted a "pleasure" that "approaches the limits of pain" (25), and produced "a long chain of consequences" operating throughout her life" (25). Ironically, then, in Hays' novel, Rousseau is held to be responsible for inculcating a dangerous openness to suffering that, in The New Heloise, he ostensibly sought to reform.<sup>10</sup>

The association between compassion and women is de-naturalized in a second way, as well. Hays attributes the hyper-sensibility of women to a society that offers little choice for women but to depend upon a series of foolish, amoral, or immoral men. Although Emma endeavors to acquire a "rational independence" (27), for example, her profligate father had squandered her inheritance, leaving her at the mercy of unfeeling friends and relatives. Unlike St. Preux, then, who had been put into useful service, she has no existence outside a stifling private life. "Cruel prejudices!" she writes, ". . . Why was I not educated for commerce, for a profession, for labour?" (30). Increasingly her sphere of interests and her social circle narrow, and with them, the objects offered to her imagination. When she meets Augustus Harley--the "St. Preux, the Emeilus of [her] sleeping and waking reveries" (59)--"reason" is made "auxiliary to her passion" (61), not because she is naturally compassionate, but because of her increasingly marginalized position in society. "I was compelled to acknowledge, to myself," she writes, "that solitude" and "the absence of other impressions" awakened dangerous sensibilities, until

she believed that she loved an "ideal object" (61). The novel ends with the hope that Emma's own "moral martyrdom" will inspire others to "emancipate the human mind from superstition" and "teach it, that its true dignity and virtue, consist in being free" (199).

Hays' overtly political rhetoric should indicate how intimately the language of ethics, feeling, and politics were allied for eighteenth-century writers, even for those women whose work is sometimes read as though it did little more than display the writer's individual "sensibility," her personal feelings and private desires. As moralists who desired to appropriate moral discourse for their own political ends, both Hays and her mentor, Mary Wollstonecraft, were necessarily interested in examining the nature and value of qualities that were thought to peculiarly "masculine" or "feminine," and in turning those to women's best advantage. Yet it has by now become a commonplace of feminist criticism that women and other muted groups must speak through the dominant discourse if they are to speak at all,<sup>11</sup> so one should also remember that Hays and Wollstonecraft had a limited number of choices regarding the words, figures, and discourses that each would employ. Their feminism, consequently, is perhaps best characterized by a series of strategies; it is made up of an artillery of essentially conservative discourses which together allowed women to intervene in the deployment of other and even more threatening male-biased systems. With that rather imposing metaphor in mind, we can now turn to the work of Mary

Wollstonecraft.

### Slaves to Compassion

Religion, for example, was an important aspect of Mary Wollstonecraft's feminist arguments.<sup>12</sup> Throughout her work Wollstonecraft would consistently call upon both men and women to practice a rational religion associated with Richard Price and the Dissenters. The advantage of this religious position for mid-eighteenth-century women is two-fold. First, the lines between masculine and feminine virtues are obscured under a single notion of moral excellence. In Thoughts on the Education of Daughters, for example, Wollstonecraft argues that men and women alike have a duty to perform acts of benevolence: "The wisdom of the Almighty has so ordered things," she writes, "that one cause produces many effects. . . . Active virtue fits us for the society of more exalted beings. Our philanthropy is a proof, we are told, that we are capable of loving our Creator" (67). This single duty is thought to signify one's relationship to a single divine body and soul. "Indeed," she continues, "this divine love, or charity, appears to me the principal trait that remains of the illustrious character of the Deity, which was originally stamp'd on the souls, and which is to be renewed" (67). The real issue in such passages, then--what distinguishes them from mainstream benevolist writings--is not a valorization of suffering, but Wollstonecraft's determination to prove that women, like men, are "stamp'd" with the "illustrious character" of God, that they too are capable of "active

virtue."

Even in this early work, however, she imposes limitations upon compassion. Much of Thoughts on the Education of Daughters, for example, is devoted to exposing the situation of women who work as governesses for fashionable families. Drawing upon her own experience, Wollstonecraft warns governesses that they will be subject to the "tyrannical domineering tempers" of their employers, and that, moreover, this situation cannot be met with Christian suffering:

The tender, who are so by nature, or those whom religion has molded with so heavenly a disposition, give way for the sake of peace--yet still this giving way undermines their domestic comfort, and stops the current of affection; they labor for patience, and labor is ever painful. (61).

Elsewhere in that text, she encourages women to study medicine so as to become "judicious nurse[s]" (104). "Many a person," she warns, "who has had a sensible physician to attend them, have been lost for the want of the other; for tenderness, without judgment, sometimes does more harm than good (104).

In de-valuing automatic and unthinking compassion, Wollstonecraft may appear to be in alliance with mid-eighteenth-century moralists who sought to establish the moral superiority of men. This near alliance, however, signifies neither her admiration for them, nor her contempt for women. Given her own position as woman and a moralist, it

is simply an effect of the already-politicized discourse in which she is forced to intervene. But because Wollstonecraft writes from outside the comparably comfortable positions enjoyed by Hume, Smith, and Rousseau, she is also able to present a kind of "double vision" where the ethics of compassion are necessarily abandoned, while the victims of society are not. Unlike Smith, for whom women merely serve as a "sex" which embodies a certain configuration of moral qualities, Wollstonecraft represents women as a class, who, given their status as wives or barely employable persons within a market economy, are always already dependent upon the arbitrary power of others, upon their charity, institutions, values, and norms. As she will later write in Rights of Woman, in the "discharge of the simplest duty, we are often obliged to act contrary to the present impulse of tenderness or compassion" (68). For such "present impulse[s]" she would substitute the rights and duties promoted and enjoyed by middle-class men which, presumably, would make compassion unnecessary. Thus immediately after this comment, Wollstonecraft makes the argument that "asylums and Magdalenes" are not proper remedies for prostitutes, many of whom are victims of their sex and class. "It is justice," she claims, and "not charity, that is wanting in the world!" (71).

The second advantage of Wollstonecraft's religious position is that it allows her to re-value the female body, to remove it from the economies already set up by eighteenth-century men. As I have suggested, it was a commonplace of

eighteenth-century medical texts that the mind bore an intrinsic relationship to the body by virtue of the "sympathetic system." Hume, Smith, and Rousseau had used this connection between the mind and the body in a circular argument that women, who have the weaker bodies, also have the weaker and therefore more-easily corrupted minds. Wollstonecraft accepts the mind/body association without question, but, drawing upon an essentially religious concept of "purity," revises it to suit her own feminist ends. As she writes in her first published prose piece, Thoughts on the Education of Daughters, "from the body's purity the mind receives a sympathetic aid" (35). From this point of view, Wollstonecraft is able to remove the female body from an anti-feminist standard of moral strength and return it to the individual female's control, where the purity of one's body can become a measure of one's moral and mental well-being.

We can see how Wollstonecraft recoups the female body from its morally secondary position through a brief analysis of Mary, A Fiction (1788). While this work is often regarded as a novel of sensibility based upon Wollstonecraft's tumultuous private life (Ferguson and Todd, 106-107), it is clear that Wollstonecraft followed Rousseau, Hays, and others in shaping her experiences so as to enter into an ongoing dialogue about the moral and political value(s) of women and men.<sup>13</sup> Within that context, Mary, A Fiction offers a shrewd analysis of how unthinking compassion, and the institutions which promote it, affect eighteenth-century women. In this novel the heroine is doubly doomed: first by a society which treats women as



commodities--Mary is given to her husband "with an estate" (28)--and second by a culture that identifies the moral value of women with their ability to respond to pain. Throughout the novel, Mary is described as a "slave of compassion" (7), a woman "in love with misery" (34). This almost masochistic propensity, significantly, is learned from Mary's mother, a sick and indolent woman who favors her indifferent son over Mary: "the apparent partiality she shewed to her brother gave her exquisite pain--produced a kind of habitual melancholy, led her into a fondness for reading tales of woe, and made her almost realize the fictitious distress" (6). While this susceptibility to the suffering of others makes Mary "desirous of pleasing every human creature" (22)--and therefore adored by "the servants and the poor" (12)--instead of feeling as though she plays a part in the greater society, Mary lives alone, and miserable in her solitude.

As is apparent from the partial synopsis above, this novel introduces Wollstonecraft's ongoing concern with how faulty institutions and corrupt ethics conspire to keep women in a position of economic and moral secondariness, dependent, always, upon the graces and judgment of men. What Wollstonecraft calls Mary's "negative good-nature" (1) is slowly revealed to be a self-destructive response to imperfect people in a radically imperfect world. When her own fortune is depleted, and she can no longer relieve the suffering of others, she is thrust back on her own moral resources, which are found to be inadequate: "Too well have I loved my fellow creatures!" she writes, "I have not the

medicine of life, the dear chimera I have so often chased, a friend" (52). Eventually, she meets the dying Henry, who temporarily serves as her "friend" and "protector," shielding her from "the assaults of an unfeeling world" (61). After his death, Mary "visited the sick, supported the old, and educated the young" (67) but even "benevolence and religion" could not fill the "void" (68) left by his passing.

Lest we assume that Mary's compassion is a quality to be celebrated, it is important to note that Mary's automatic and almost self-indulgent desire to participate in and perhaps relieve the pain of suffering others is represented in the preface of the novel as a moral flaw, as a product of her education and culture. She is described as being typical of her sex and class: "educated with the expectation of a large fortune" she attends "carefully to the shews of things"; her "prejudices were such as the generality approve of" (1). Missing from this equation, as Wollstonecraft's polemical writings make clear, is that Mary was not taught to be a self-sufficient and autonomous being, whose moral worth is guaranteed by God rather than by some presumably natural propensity to suffer. Following this logic, Mary's mistake was not to have cultivated compassion or pity; it is, instead, to have done it thoughtlessly, to have fetishized human suffering, to have blindly and perhaps even selfishly performed benevolent acts. In focusing her moral energies upon a series of earthly objects, moreover, Mary mistakes human pity for divine love, so is not able to turn to God when her would-be benevolism fails or is thwarted. Destitute

and alone, Mary thus becomes an object of pity herself: "The healing balm of sympathy is denied; I weep, a solitary wretch, and the hot tears scald my cheeks" (52).

In representing the compassionate qualities of Mary as a learned (and inadequate) response to a flawed world, Wollstonecraft accomplishes two things: she undermines any necessary association between unthinking compassion and women perpetuated by eighteenth-century science, and she intervenes in the attempt of eighteenth-century moralists to promote and institutionalize that association within their own moral systems. Within that context, the novel functions exemplum malum to portray the damaging effects of unthinking compassion upon the moral and therefore physical being of women. In it what Robert Markley calls "the commodification of 'good nature'" (211) is revealed, at best, to be a foolish and self-congratulatory mode of behavior; at worst, as exemplified by Mary's life, it is shown to be physically self-destructive, as well.<sup>14</sup> It is no accident, for example, that Mary is peopled with (too-sensitive) characters, all of whom are diseased or dying: Mary's parents, Ann, Henry, and even Mary herself, since her "delicate state of health," Wollstonecraft concludes, "did not promise long life" (68). The bodies in this novel may be read as signifying the relative health of the mind, and vice-versa. Indeed, from this point of view, Mary, A Fiction reads like an eighteenth-century Magic Mountain, where diseased minds and bodies are meant to suggest that disease is rampant in the contemporary and spiritually misguided world. Correspondingly, as

Wollstonecraft's rational religion enables her to believe, through those same minds and bodies, that world is capable of being reformed.

The female body, then, is as important to Wollstonecraft's moral and political vision as it was to Rousseau, but with a difference that perhaps reflects the already secondary moral and political position of the female writer. In The New Heloise, Rousseau's political allegory turns upon a sexual relationship between Julie and St. Preux, enabled by Julie's compassion. Alternatively, unlike Julie's relationships, Mary's are ostensibly non-sexual: Mary marries George out of parental coercion; she loves Ann in order to be useful; and with Henry she "was in love with misery" (34). There are several explanations for this lack of sexuality in the novel, but the most relevant one, at the moment, is that Wollstonecraft seems to want to underscore the fact that the immediate reference of her novel is to modes of feeling and behavior, and not to sexuality as such, which, for Clarissa and Julie, had signified their seducer's moral decadence, and had enabled his eventual elevation.<sup>15</sup> This strategy is important, since through suppressing the sexual, Wollstonecraft is able to re-appropriate the female body, to empower it outside of some already libidinized economy. Having done that, she is able to represent the heroine's body as an index of her own moral nature, which is clearly thought to be capable of progressive re-form. Following this logic, Mary, A Fiction may be regarded as an allegory of moral decay, where the physical and emotional relationship between

men and women is finally less important than the relationship between any man or woman and God, who, significantly, is absent from the tale.<sup>16</sup>

In Wollstonecraft's later writing, the relatively progressive religious position implicit in Mary, A Fiction will play an even more important role as she uses it to attack the implicit misogyny in the comparatively secular systems of Hume, Smith, Rousseau, and others. This may not be immediately apparent. The major premise of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, for example, is that "equality" is the basis of the "social affections" which are realized in rational marriage (157) and which should be extended throughout society as a whole; its minor premise is that moral writers are complicitous in promoting inequality, insofar as they advocate the doctrine of separate virtues which denies the moral equality of women under God. "Ignorance," she writes, "is a frail base for virtue!"

Yet, that is the condition for which woman was organized, has been insisted upon by the writers who have most vehemently argued in favor of the superiority of man; a superiority not in degree, but essence; though, to soften the argument, they have labored to prove, with chivalrous generosity, that the sexes ought not to be compared; man was made to reason, women to feel: and that together, flesh and spirit, they make to most perfect whole, by blending happily reason and

sensibility into one character. (63)

In contrast to Hume, Smith, and Rousseau, Wollstonecraft argues that all men and women should be educated after the "same model, or intercourse of the sexes will never deserve the name of fellowship, nor will women fulfill the duties of their sex until they are independent of men as one man is independent of another" (165).

This explicitly political rhetoric, however, is supported by Wollstonecraft's argument scattered throughout this text that any doctrine of separate virtues is not only unfair to women, but finally un-Christian. Any system, she argues, which posits two different moralities--one based on feeling, and the other upon thought--is almost pagan in its implications. Women are taught to value a morality that suggests "no other idea than of the most exquisitely polished instinct" where there is "no trace of the image of God in either sensation or matter" (63). Although Wollstonecraft's comments in this section of the Rights of Woman are most clearly directed toward Rousseau, insofar as woman's moral sensibility is associated with unthinking compassion in the writings of Hume and Smith, they, too are complicitous with Rousseau in representing women, however politely, in terms of matter alone. As Wollstonecraft writes disdainfully in a later section of the Rights of Woman in which Smith is named outright, "Women are supposed to possess more sensibility, and even humanity, than men, and their strong attachments and instantaneous emotions of compassion are given as proofs; but the clinging affection of ignorance seldom has anything noble

in it, and may mostly be resolved into selfishness, as well as the affection of children and brutes" (188).

This critique of moral difference is necessary to ensure the success of Wollstonecraft's larger project, which is to intervene in the ideology that supported the rights and value of middle-class men--to expand what she will later call woman's "sphere of action." As we have seen, there is in eighteenth-century moral thought a necessary link between public virtues, mutual sympathy, and citizenship, from which women were excluded. In response, throughout the Rights of Woman Wollstonecraft will attempt to extend the language (and possibility) of judgement and aspiration, heretofore confined to men, to women as well, largely through re-defining the structures of sympathy so that women are included. While the specific structures of Wollstonecraft's domestic reform will be discussed at length in the following chapter, it is important to understand the conceptual basis of Wollstonecraft's moral and political system, to which I now turn.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Partial Spectator**

With Smith--whom she variously describes as an "acute observer" (58), a "grave philosophical reasoner" (90) and a "cool reasoner" (133)--Wollstonecraft represents sympathy as the basis of all social bonds.<sup>18</sup> "The charm of life," she writes, quoting Smith, is "sympathy; nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast" (90). Yet women are excluded from

this mutual sympathy by virtue of their private existence and their limited station which, ironically to Wollstonecraft, are often represented as a "privilege" granted to the sex as a whole. While men "from the middle rank of life" have "at least an opportunity of exerting themselves with dignity," she claims, women are born into a paradoxical state with "certain sexual privileges" which thwart the desire for respect and esteem (57). "When do we hear of women," she asks, "who, starting out of obscurity, boldly claim respect on account of their great abilities or daring virtues? Where are they to be found?" (57). Instead of practicing the virtues of middle-class men, women are privileged slaves of those upon whom their power and influence depends. They thus share the precarious position of the aristocracy, a rarified and protected species whom Smith had criticized in The Theory of Moral Sentiments for their superficial graces and frivolous accomplishments (58-60).<sup>19</sup>

Throughout the Rights of Woman Wollstonecraft posits several apparently contradictory remedies to this situation. First, reversing the negative portrayal of women in Mary, A Fiction, Wollstonecraft argues that women have an obligation to themselves as rational creatures to educate themselves, to exercise, like men, their bodies and minds. As she writes in the opening of the Rights of Woman:

I wish . . . to persuade women to endeavor to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of



sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt. (9)

Second, she calls for a reorganization of society so that women, although they are most often confined to private existence, might be endowed with public value and "duties" even within this married state. Some women, she argues, should be allowed to enter the public realm and practice a limited number of professions, including "the art of healing" (151-52), a practice that was only recently being taken over by men. Most, however, should incorporate the public values of men in practicing "rational motherhood," a vocation which she regards as "indispensible" to widescale social reform (142).

The idea of rational motherhood is, arguably, the cornerstone of Wollstonecraft's political system, and the point at which sympathy plays the greatest role.<sup>20</sup> In order to understand how this works, it is necessary to keep in mind that part of the goal of the Rights of Woman is to politicize the domestic duties of women, to make them equal to the public functions of men. Since these duties are for the most part private ones, Wollstonecraft must make private virtues central to the good of the state--more central, in fact, than the public virtues of men. Thus, as Myers has pointed out, she appropriates the martial metaphors of Smith and Rousseau

to characterize the duties of a mother who is represented as being more central than a soldier in fulfilling the duties "of a citizen" (145). She argues that the only "justifiable war" in the present state of society is a "defensive war" against moral corruption, and that women have a central role to play within it. Were women encouraged to "keep their thoughts in motion" (145) by practicing active virtue, "the true heroism of antiquity," she writes, "might again animate female bosoms" (146).

This comparison between the "character of a modern soldier" and a "civilized woman," should not, however, be taken at face value (146). Although Myers has described this impulse to "create a pattern of female domestic heroism" as a common move on the part of eighteenth-century female writers, in Wollstonecraft's case, at least, this metaphor functions as a rhetorical strategy intended largely to criticize the misplaced priorities of middle-class men. "I am not going to advise [women]," she writes, "to turn their distaff into a musket, though I sincerely wish to see the bayonet converted into a pruning-hook" (146). She claims that an inadvertent attention to power and wealth has "muddled the pure rills of natural affection" (146) that is dependent not upon imperialism, as Smith indirectly suggests, but upon a stable domestic economy (146) where every person may serve the country as an equal and equally-valued citizen. That this vision of women waging a "defensive war" is simply a rhetorical ploy she self-consciously admits. "I only recreated an imagination," she writes, "by supposing that

society will some time or another be so constituted, that men must necessarily fulfill the duties of a citizen, or be despised, and that while he was employed in any of the departments of civil life, his wife, also an active citizen, should be equally intent to manage her family, educate her children, and assist her neighbors" (146). Despite the martial metaphors, then, Wollstonecraft does not advocate a wholesale transformation in the roles of men and women--with few exceptions, she is content to support an emergent public/private dichotomy--but a transformation in the values with which those roles are endowed. She simply wants people to appreciate the important place of motherhood to the present and future of the state. It is imperative that we understand Wollstonecraft's argument for rational motherhood as an essentially compensatory move, which should not be mistaken for a completely thought out social, moral, or political agenda. It is imperative, that is, that we do not impose our own political agendas too quickly upon the text,<sup>1</sup> as it is all too easy to do. Some critics, for example, have interpreted this newly-empowered domestic role as being "potentially revolutionary"; Myers argues that as a "proponent of the humanizing values associated with home," Wollstonecraft interprets "domestic culture as proffering active roles, constructive channels through which women can aid in revitalizing the world to conform to the values of home, not the materialistic marketplace" (334). On the other hand, essentially socialist feminists such as Zillah Eisenstein note that Wollstonecraft "never addresses the

issue that, as mothers, married women are economically dependent on their husbands because there is no direct payment for this work. This would have been a challenge to the patriarchy that she was unable to make" (100). While both of these insights are important to Wollstonecraft criticism and feminism as a whole, I cannot help but believe that in their desire to locate and evaluate Wollstonecraft's feminism in familiar terms, they overlook a major aspect of this eighteenth-century feminist text.

At issue in The Rights of Woman are gender-specific virtues which are already loaded with political implications. The difference between the gender-specific virtues is not only a concrete economic division of labor which (for us or for Wollstonecraft) might be righted through economic or moral reform; it is also an axiological one, though which women's personal and social value--or lack of value--was located, marked, distributed, and assigned. Wollstonecraft realizes that in order to be the moral equals of men, women must re-define their domestic duties so as to make them central and not antithetical to the future of the state. The significant point, then, is not the success or failure of her project, but how this redefinition and revaluation of woman's role is promoted and guaranteed.

Within this context, it is telling that Wollstonecraft appropriates the discourse of sympathy to endow women with social and moral authority, in two distinct but interrelated ways. First, with Smith, she argues that "natural affection" among people is "a very faint tie" (152). The social

affections must "grow out of the habitual exercise of a mutual sympathy" among family members (152).<sup>21</sup> Unlike Smith, however, who had argued that the most respectable and even "natural" attachment takes place between two virtuous men (TMS 224-25), Wollstonecraft makes the domestic affections more fundamental than any later social relationship:

Few, I believe, have had much affection for mankind, who did not first love their parents, their brothers, sisters, and even the domestic brutes, whom they first played with. The exercise of youthful sympathies forms the moral temperature; and it is the recollection these first affections that gives life to those that are afterwards more under the direction of reason. (162)

In Wollstonecraft's vision of the good society, women and men constitute a "greater family" bound together not only by mutual admiration and esteem, but, prior to that, by a "cord of love" that is analogous to the relationship between a rational mother and her child. Thus against Smith, who had argued that "what is called natural affection [is] more the effect of the moral than of the supposed physical relationship between the parent and the child" (TMS 223), Wollstonecraft insists that the most primary tie of sympathetic connection is that original bond. Maternal feelings, she claims, are actually a "natural substitute for love" when the lover (as he necessarily must) becomes only a friend. A child then appears, who "gently twists the relaxing

cord, and a mutual care produces a new mutual sympathy" (152). In this version of the good society, women are represented as the founders and keepers of important social bonds. Their moral value is guaranteed, moreover, by the fact that the relationship between a mother and her child is neither simply physical (as in love) nor simply moral (as in the relationship between two virtuous men); it is instead, a physical and moral relationship that is represented as being prior to the social itself. This explains why Wollstonecraft devotes so much energy to celebrating breast-feeding as an active and necessary duty, even to the point of claiming that it is woman's primary civic role. "Her parental affection," she writes, "scarcely deserves the name, when it does not lead her to suckle her children, because the discharge of this duty is equally calculated to inspire maternal and filial affection: and it is the indispensable duty of men and women to fulfill the duties which give birth to affections that are the surest preventatives against vice" (152). In a sense, then, in order to guarantee women the moral and social significance denied to her by writers like Hume, Smith, and Rousseau--in order to make her central to the good of the state--Wollstonecraft is compelled to simultaneously naturalize and re-value a mode of feminization that each of them sought to marginalize or displace.

Before going on, it is perhaps helpful to summarize the argument thus far. In this chapter I have claimed, first, that Wollstonecraft's desire to control and regulate compassion--a desire most apparent in her early works--is

intrinsically related to eighteenth-century political theory, where thoughtful self-representation is necessary to fellow-feeling, and thus to citizenship in the public realm. It is easy to see how Wollstonecraft's call for women's enlarged "sphere of action" in the Rights of Woman intersects with this problematic, insofar as it represents another and more positive attempt to extend to women the public value of middle-class men, to politicize the realm to which women, for the most part, were confined. The discourse of sympathy, I suggested, is central to this process, in that Wollstonecraft appropriates and revises Smith's structures of domestic reform to serve her own end, which is to describe the natural difference of women as a positive good, as the origin of active virtues that should, she claims, be invested with civil significance.

Any moralist worth his salt--or any feminist worth hers--knows, however, that to claim that an act should be endowed with moral or political value is not necessarily to make it so. Values--like emotions, habits, and even languages--are part of a complex code that reflects and reinforces the concrete structures of power in any given society. Thus Wollstonecraft is not content to simply politicize the domestic, to increase women's "sphere of action" (100). As she well realized, social norms--particularly those regarding women's virtue--are built on "mutable prejudices" (102). What is necessary, then, is a more stable or less partial basis of moral judgment than that proposed by Hume and Smith. "To have in this uncertain world some stay," she writes, "which cannot

be undermined, is of the utmost consequence; and this stay it is, which gives that dignity to the manners, which shews that a person does not depend on mere human applause for comfort and satisfaction" (34). Correspondingly, throughout the Rights of Woman, although she retains the specular structure of moral judgment, she removes it from the relationship between an individual and the world, to a relationship between an individual and God.

Smith, we recall, had argued that the virtues of "esteem" or self-command, require the ability to "suppose the idea of some other being, who is the natural judge of the person who feels them" (193). They require the ability, through the process of "disinterested" negotiation, to internalize the impartial spectator. As Smith continues, "it is only by sympathy with the decisions of this arbiter of his conduct, that he can conceive, either the triumph of self-applause, or the shame of self-condemnation" (TMS 193). Speaking now from her own sensitivity to woman's secondary position, Wollstonecraft claims that women cannot bow to the moral authority of men: "If we really deserve our own good opinion we shall commonly be respected in the world; but if we pant after higher attainments, it is not sufficient to view ourselves as we suppose we are viewed by others, though this has been ingeniously argued, as the foundation of our moral sentiments" (135). Consequently, rather than regulating their behavior so as to conform to clear double standards, women, she writes, should "improve themselves until they rise above the fumes of vanity; and then . . . let public opinion come



around" (98).

In the meantime, she claims, only God is qualified to judge such a person's actions, so that this relationship should matter more than an often frivolous and inevitably anti-female body of public opinion: "We should endeavor to view ourselves as we suppose that being views us who seeth each thought ripen into action, and whose judgment never swerves from the eternal rule of right" (135). In Wollstonecraft's moral system, compassion is not de-valued. It is instead displaced onto an arguably now-feminized God: "The Almighty," she writes, "is then the kind parent, who chastens and educates, and indulges us not when it would tend to hurt. He is compassion itself, and never wounds but to heal, when the ends of correction are answered" (73). Ironically, then, in theory and perhaps in practice, Wollstonecraft seems to reinforce Smith's contention that the "extreme humanity" he and the other moralists so eagerly attributed to women is "unfit for this world" (40).<sup>22</sup>

The precise nature of Wollstonecraft's writing of value--her reliance upon rhetoric borrowed from the Dissenters, her arguments with Rousseau, and her partial revisions of Smith--thus constitutes a series of interventionist strategies through which the minds and bodies of women were recast into a more "esteemed" position. In substituting God, reason, or a single standard of excellence for public "applause"--the measure applied to the writing of men--Wollstonecraft simultaneously creates an opening for women (like herself) who quite literally cannot afford to exhibit the "soft

virtues," the only virtues for women that Hume, Smith, and Rousseau would allow. It is important to realize, however, that her moral program was not the only sign of eighteenth-century feminism. Wollstonecraft's writing, I have insisted, is part of a larger ethico-political context. This context includes not only male moralists, but "conservative" women such as Hannah More who may also claim to have contributed to modern feminist theory and practice. In the following chapter, by focusing upon the similarities and differences between More and Wollstonecraft, I shall seek to make that connection clear.

## Notes to Chapter Three

1. See, for example, Mullan 57-113; Johnson; Todd 1986, 19-21. In his analysis of Clarissa, Mullan draws connections between eighteenth-century medicine, the writing of "sensibility," and the moral secondariness of women which are central to this chapter.

2. Indeed, as Foucault has argued in Madness and Civilization (1965), this mapping of what then being called the "sympathetic system" eventually led to the widespread acceptance of the female as an hysteric, outside the bounds of language and incapable of self-control (153-54).

3. Smith describes the involuntary nature of compassion, and its relationship to the body, at length in his opening chapter: "Persons of delicate fibres and a weak constitution of body complain, that in looking on the sores and ulcers which are exposed by beggars in the streets, they are apt to feel an itching or uneasy sensation in the correspondent part of their bodies. The horror which they conceive at the misery of those wretches affects that particular part in themselves more than any other; because that horror arises from conceiving what they themselves would suffer, if they really were the wretches whom they are looking upon...The very force of this conception is sufficient, in their feeble frames, to produce that itching or uneasy sensation complained of" (TMS 10).

4. It is interesting to note, in passing, that from the point of view of the ethics of self-command, pity implies a lack of sympathy from and with others which, in the ethics of Smith and Hume, is always associated with "shame". This is undoubtedly related to the fact that in popular psychology, as we saw above, "pity" is closely tied with the body, and thus with matter and material pain that is not easily sympathized with. Smith makes this point by comparing the feelings aroused in spectators by a person on a scaffold, on the one hand, and a pillory, on the other. While the first provokes "sympathy" from the crowd, the latter mode of punishment, because connected with bodily pain, can provoke nothing but "that consciousness that his misery is felt by himself only, which is of all sentiments the most unsupportable....There is no sympathy...but with his consciousness of the want of sympathy with which this pain is attended. It is with his shame, not with his sorrow. Those who pity him, blush and hang down their heads for him" (TMS 60).

5. On the relationship between Wollstonecraft and Rousseau, see Ferguson and Todd; Eisenstein 55-112.

6. Political readings of The New Heloise abound. For a recent discussion of this novel within an historicist and post-structuralist frame, see Kamuf 97-122. "Like the Heloise

of . . . twelfth-century letters, Julie is positioned at the juncture of one social order which can no longer sustain its claim to legitimate power and another which must succeed to that claim without violence, that is, legitimately. In The New Eloise, this articulation is worked out through Julie's passage from her father's archaic law of aristocratic privilege to the renewed order of an enlightened Wolmar, a passage that marks the intermediate term of her passion for St. Preux as disorder" (103). See also Waller, whose interpretation intersects with mine in interesting ways.

7. Feminist critics have long commented upon Rousseau's sexual politics, particularly upon how his concept of female modesty (or "moral love") is thought to be necessary to the preservation of the patriarchal state. As Cora Kaplan has argued a propos of Rousseau, "In civil society women's amoral weakness must not be given its natural scope unless it lead, as it inevitably must, to adultery and criminal consequence, the foisting of illegitimate heirs on bourgeois husbands" (39).

8. Although I follow the Masters translation here, in Of Grammatology Spivak translates pity (*pitié*) as "compassion."

9. The relatively recent idea that "sensibility" literature must be read in terms of its representation of gender can be found in Mullan; Markley; Bystrom; and Johnson, who noting a "curious asymmetry" in portrayals of female characters, states correctly that "sensibility is the affective arena of an ideology oppressive to women" (15). Johnson's account of sensibility stands in sharp contrast to those of Rogers and others, who desire to represent Richardson (for example) as a kind of proto-feminist.

10. Such stray attempts to displace a male-biased system of values through gender inversion are typical of the early feminist polemic; both Hays and Wollstonecraft accuse their male contemporaries of sharing the "effeminate" qualities of that Rousseau, Smith, Hume, and Burke sought so diligently to attribute to women. In the Rights of Woman, for example, Wollstonecraft makes a similar gesture toward Rousseau, when she claims disdainfully that people "sympathize" with Rousseau: he makes them "feel," she argues, "not think" (91). These strategies have lead some critics (including Mary Poovey) to accuse of Wollstonecraft, Hays, and others of adopting the male-biased values against which they react. This criticism is insensitive not only to the nature of value-formation but to the subject-positions of early radicals, faced with the impulse to naturalize feminine virtues by which women were being excluded from moral judgment and participation in the public realm. The important point, then, is that gender-inversion is derived from an awareness that the "feminine" is always already devalued, and is aligned with more specific socio-political critiques of a society that does not offer women more appropriate objects for their active imaginations than the company of (weak,

profligate, romantic, or tyrannical) men upon whom women are forced to depend.

11. The theory of muted groups, usually associated with Shirley and Edwin Ardener and Clifford Geertz, was introduced to mainstream feminist criticism by Showalter. "All language is the language of the dominant order, and women, if they speak at all, must speak through it" (262).

12. Although I will focus upon the heuristic aspects of Wollstonecraft's relationship to religion in the argument which follows, her actual association with the Dissenters is closely related to that. The loosely-organized British Dissenters, as Marilyn Butler points out, symbolized left-wing politics in Britain. They included radicals Priestley, Price, Blake, Godwin, Hays, and Wollstonecraft, all of whom, despite their similar politics, took great pains to disassociate themselves from French atheists such as Volney (79). Wollstonecraft probably first became associated with the group when she, her sister Eliza, and Fanny Blood "set up a small school in the Dissenting community of Newington Green" in 1783, where she met Richard Price (Tyson 67). As a group, the Dissenters were fierce individualists who believed that all people were equal under God, which made them amenable to feminist arguments, and often actively supportive of them. It is significant, for example, that all of Wollstonecraft's writing was published by Joseph Johnson, himself a Dissenter, and thus one of the few publishers devoted to distributing leftist writing. See Tyson.

13. Most critics treat Wollstonecraft within one of two overlapping contexts: as a political writer, who inherits the problematical structures of liberalism; or as a moral writer working within and against "sensibility" literature. In essence, feminist critics often follow their male counterparts in separating the language of politics and ethics, so that what emerges is a strange and unjustified distinction between the language of "individualism" and the language of the individual, whose feelings and emotions may be discerned and interpreted within some psychoanalytic frame. The latter approach, of course, has dominated in literary criticism, where it has resulted in many fine psycho-biographical readings of Wollstonecraft's work. In this analysis, however, my goal is to co-ordinate these apparently disparate approaches to Wollstonecraft's work by reading the politics of ethical language, including the language of sensibility. My working assumption is that the language of individual "feeling" is intimately related to the rise of "individualism" in eighteenth-century moral and political theory. To put it another way, the discourse of feeling--what we usually call "sensibility"--is actually a dense field of linguistic and political struggle, where the most consistent tactic is to represent "feeling" as the product of individual desire. Through appeals to one's own feeling as the source of truth or value, the ideology of "individualism"--including the contours of individual

"sexuality"--was organized and promoted. Given this, to read the language of feeling as signifying sexual desire, (whether that is manifest or repressed) is necessarily to elide the discourse of sympathy, where, I would argue, representations of sexuality, individual feeling, and political empowerment are most clearly allied.

14. See, for example, Robert Markley's analysis of Shaftesbury, Sterne, Steele, and others: "For many middle-class authors, sentimentality--the generosity of feeling--becomes their claim to a cultural power-sharing based upon a liberal interpretation of 'breeding' that equates hereditary power and moral sensitivity" (218). Such broad class analyses of "sensibility"--even those as insightful as this one--fail to consider the contradictions within sensibility literature itself, including the fact that women, who were largely responsible for its rapid promotion, were upon that basis held responsible for their own ethical, political, and professional secondariness.

15. I do not mean to suggest that sexuality (or the language of sexuality) was not important to women's writing; simply that it should not be conflated with the language of feeling which, more often than not, has a direct reference to ethical and political discourse where "lust," "chastity," and "rational desire" were key terms in arguments over the moral value of men and women. For an interesting analysis of this problem, see Kaplan; for an opposing view, see Lingbauer.

16. For an alternate reading of *Mary* as a novel of sensibility whose theme is "the growth of a philanthropist" that actually reflects Wollstonecraft's "longing for love" see Ferguson and Todd 33-38.

17. Godwin felt that Wollstonecraft's morality cannot be systematized, and to a certain extent, he is right, particularly insofar as so much her writing necessarily takes the form of critique. This reactive position does not, however, obscure her reliance upon and revision of moralists such as Smith.

18. In insisting that the discourse of sympathy is important to eighteenth-century feminism, this argument will run against the grain of some traditional accounts which, following Lloyd and others, make the desire to be regarded as "rational" beings the driving impulse behind the work of writers such as Wollstonecraft. According to Carolyn Korsmeyer, for example, the eighteenth-century debates regarding the foundation of morals--the writings of Hume, Smith, and others--"had little or no effect upon the question of the rationality of women and the political ramifications of this question" (286). Mitzi Myers' position is closer to my own. Myers has demonstrated how early feminism is characterized by women as diverse as Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More calling for a "reconstituted domestic ideal" in which women were thought to serve as "a focal point for moral

regeneration" (329). As Myers illustrates, each cast the prevalent bourgeois ethic in women's terms by promoting a "pattern of female domestic heroism, an image of activity, strength, fortitude, and ethical maturity, of self-denial, purity, and truth" (335). While this "reconstituted domestic ideal" and the "pattern of female domestic heroism" through which it was thought to be effected are clearly related to the discourse of sympathy and its ethic of self-command, Myers does not examine those within the context of sympathy.

19. Both Guralnick and Kay 1986 comment upon Wollstonecraft's response to Smith's characterization of the aristocracy.

20. The idea that women should be educated so as to be better mothers goes back at least as far as Locke. They were simply educated with a difference that reflected their non-public position. "The aim of a girl's education," writes one critic, "was to improve her moral character, [to] make her able to take part in a general conversation with men without making a fool of herself, and equip her to educate her own children" (Browne 42).

21. See Smith (TMS 220-224) on domestic education and family affection. "What is called affection," he writes, "is in reality nothing by habitual sympathy" (220).

22. "We only regret that it is unfit for this world, because the world is unworthy of it, and because it must expose the person who is endowed with it as a prey to the perfidy and ingratitude of insinuating falsehood, and to a thousand pains and uneasinesses, which, of all men, he least deserves to feel, and which generally too he is, of all men, the least capable of supporting" (TMS 40).

#### Chapter Four: Wollstonecraft, More, and the Limits of Sympathy

A fundamental assumption of many poststructuralist feminisms is that every discourse emerges from struggle and contradiction.<sup>1</sup> While I have so far focused upon struggle within a relatively purified discourse of sympathy--within the realms of ethics, aesthetics, and politics--one must also be prepared to apply this same criterion to the study of the discourse of feminism. In fact, to do otherwise is to represent feminism as sentiments, impulses, behaviors, practices, or strategies existing apart from the language of their construction, and thus apart from the male-biased systems which that language has historically implied. In this chapter, I shall examine the way eighteenth-century feminism established itself through a series of sometimes contradictory programs for political reform, in which the language of sympathy is central. More specifically, I shall supplement the previous analyses by examining how sympathy served as a problematical and even divisive term within eighteenth-century feminism itself. This analysis, like those which preceded it, will be paradigmatic, and necessarily confined to the works of two writers, Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More.

To place Hannah More within the context of feminism is, perhaps, surprising. This moderately successful playwright,



extremely successful essayist, and devoted friend of Johnson, Garrick, and Edmund Burke is often represented as an arch-conservative. In fact, according to most accounts, More refused even to read Wollstonecraft's work. "Rights of Women!," she is said to have commented, "We will be hearing of the Rights of Children next!" (Hopkins 135). From a contemporary perspective, then, she appears to be anti-feminist, a eighteenth-century Phyllis Schafley set against Wollstonecraft's Gloria Steinham.<sup>2</sup> Admittedly, if one's feminism can be measured by arguments for or against the legal status of women, or by the nature of one's political alliances, this polarization is undeniable: the pious and rather traditional More associated with religious and intellectual circles strongly opposed to the Revolution in France, and Wollstonecraft with circles defined by Joseph Johnson, William Godwin, and other British radicals. Yet throughout this dissertation, I have insisted that eighteenth-century feminism is most often composed of interventionist or compensatory strategies which, I would now add, are reducible neither to a particular doctrine nor to a particular party alliance. As Mitzi Myers points out, Wollstonecraft and More were in some ways more alike than different, since both were forced "to shape their world views through the dominant models" which were themselves dependent upon a "male idiom" (Myers 332). In practice, moreover, both writers were active members of middle-class movements for social reform that sought to extend the language of general reform--promoted by conservatives and radicals alike--to

encompass women. In order to examine their feminist politics, then, it is necessary to examine not only how each writer is allied with a particular party, but how, given her particular alliance, each attempted to use the language of sympathy to improve the social position and moral value of her sex within that particular context.

It is precisely because women enjoy an "intermediate" moral status in the discourse of sympathy that eighteenth-century women's responses to the discourse are complicated and, as I have suggested, diverse. Generally speaking, Wollstonecraft and More's appropriation of the discourse of sympathy turns upon the question of what each perceived to be "woman's true happiness," that is, her most empowering social role. Wollstonecraft, I have argued, sought to re-value women by insisting upon their moral autonomy and the importance of "rational motherhood" in creating and preserving the social bonds by which the social is defined. She thus revises the logic of sympathy as promoted by Smith in several different ways. On the one hand, after denying that unthinking compassion is a valuable feminine trait, she attempts to extend the "masculine" virtues--including moral judgment--to middle-class women. At the same time, she insists that the (rational) mother-child relationship is more fundamental than the "mutual sympathy" presumably enjoyed by middle-class men. In effect, she erases difference at the level of culture, only to reinstate it at the level of nature, where, she seemed to believe, it could displace the primacy of male-male relationships as the ne plus ultra of appropriate sympathetic

response.

Given Wollstonecraft's implicit goal--to argue that women should be granted both moral and political value, and should therefore enjoy the rights granted to men--her complex, perhaps equivocal, and often slippery argument makes sense. In response to Hume, Smith, and Rousseau's visions of the social, she is compelled to assert that women are potentially rational and morally responsible creatures whose "natural" roles as mothers make them equally (if not more) necessary than men to the creation and maintenance of sympathetic bonds, and thus to the future of the state. However innocuous and even conservative as Wollstonecraft's argument may seem to us, it is important to remember how and why parts of it provoked controversy among Wollstonecraft's contemporaries. The radical feminist element of Wollstonecraft's argument was not that women should be educated, which was least a century old. In fact, as R. N. Jaynes has illustrated in her article on the reception of the Rights of Woman, Wollstonecraft's claim that "the mind is of no sex" was at first received favorably by most readers (307). Nor, arguably, was it that women should be granted the same rights as men, a rather utopian notion that was already a major part of Revolutionary rhetoric. It was, instead, her attempt to alter what was considered "natural" in moral discourse--to insist against most ethical, aesthetic, and political writers that the moral virtues of women and men should not differ in quality. "I see not the shadow of a reason to conclude," she writes, "that the virtues [of men and women] should differ in respect to

their nature. In fact, how can they, if virtue has only one eternal standard?" (26).

Wollstonecraft's single standard of virtue, then, is self-consciously set against a doctrine of moral difference that, as we have seen, was purposefully and assiduously being promoted by middle-class men. Perhaps because their efforts had not yet fully solidified, her argument--in potential, at least--could threaten the logic supporting the precarious moral structure of bourgeois society as a whole.

Consequently, according to Jaynes, such statements provoked a rash of satires (including Polwhele's The Unsex'd Females), and condemnations from several quarters--not only from obviously conservative anti-jacobin writers, but also, writes Jaynes, from men who despite fairly progressive views on female education and intellectual ability "were not pleased to acknowledge that the manners ought to be of no sex" (307). In order to understand why, one need simply return to the logic of sympathy itself. Unlike the sexless mind--a matter of individual consciousness which may, after all, remain private--manners are a public phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> They are related not only to how one represents oneself, but, through that, to an engendered moral system which required the exclusion of women in order for the positive self-characterization of men to be maintained. For Wollstonecraft, a woman, to insist upon being included was at some level to threaten the carefully-erected social, moral, and economic system as a whole.

Within this context, it is particularly significant that females condemned Wollstonecraft, as well. Hannah More, for

example, may be referring to Wollstonecraft when she complains in Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education that the relatively harmless "contest" for intellectual equality between men and women which had raged in the previous century has been "revived with added fury" in her own (Works VI: 144). Whereas the previous struggle had been merely a kind of "imaginary prerogative, . . . a mere titular right, a shadowy claim to a few unreal acres of Parnassian territory," the present struggle, she claims, has real political implications. It "has taken a more serious turn," she writes,

and brings forward political as well as intellectual pretensions; and among the innovations of this innovating period, the imposing term of rights has been produced to sanctify the claim of our female pretenders, with a view not only to rekindle in the minds of women a presumptuous vanity dishonorable to their sex, but produced with a view to excite in their hearts an impious discontent with the post which God has assigned them in this world." (144)

Given all the charges listed here, it is difficult to determine what most disturbs More about feminist aspirations: their long-term strategy, to gain equal rights, or their immediate goal: to "excite" in other women "an impious discontent" with what More regards as women's god-given "post". But because More is forced to appeal to the language

of religious authority in defending the "assigned" roles of women, and because so many of her works are devoted to maintaining the doctrine of separate spheres, I am inclined to believe that it is the latter. If so, the question before us now is simple: what, in upholding the doctrine of separate virtues, could Hannah More and others like her possibly hope to gain? Or, to put it another way, what could they be afraid to lose?

#### **Evangelicalism and the Value of Compassion**

"Each sex," More argues in her Strictures, "has its proper excellencies, which would be lost were they melted down into the common character by the fusion of the new philosophy" (Works VI: 144). Clearly, she is opposed to any social movement that would seek to have moral and social distinctions erased or minimalized. One way to understand this opposition is to look at it within the confines of her Evangelical Christianity.<sup>4</sup> A major tenet of Evangelical Christianity is that virtue is a private phenomenon, measured largely by the intensity of one's relationship with God. More accepts this assumption, and turns it to her advantage. First she claims that because Christianity dissolves gender difference, women must be regarded as the moral equals of men. "Christianity has exalted women to true and disputed dignity; in Christ Jesus, as there is neither 'rich nor poor,' 'bond nor free,' so there is neither 'male nor female'" (148). Second, arguing that commerce, politics, and most professions are unimportant to one's "true" spiritual

value, she readily grants men power over the public sphere. Third--and this is the force of More's argument--More attempts to convince women that by virtue of their largely cloistered existence, they in fact have the "superior advantage" over men (149).

This moral advantage is only apparent, of course, within Christianity, as More's list of women's "superior" qualities makes clear. Women's "naturally soft and flexible hearts," she argues, are "favorable to the cultivation of a devotional spirit" (149). Similarly, what she calls the "native constitution" of women, their comparative physical weakness, is seen as encouraging a spirit of "attachment and dependence" which is "peculiarly favorable to religion" (149). Even women's inferior education, More argues, ultimately works in their favor: because women commonly have less knowledge than men, they "have not to shake off the pride of system" that undermines religious faith; and because they are "naturally more affectionate than fastidious" women are better readers of Christian texts, which, she concludes, "are meant to be read in a devotional" rather than a "critical" spirit" (150).

Given More's "defense" of women, one is tempted to cast her in the same category as Rousseau (who also celebrated his "lovely ignorant fair") and thus to dismiss her as a self-hating misogynist. Yet however similar their descriptions of women's moral qualities, More casts those into a different hierarchy of value, so that they take on a different color or tone. It is important to understand that More's basically

conservative argument for moral difference functions primarily as a compensatory move at the level of value-formation itself, wherein women, denied the same social opportunities as men, attempt to compensate for this fact through what Michèle Barrett calls "corresponding ideologies of moral worth" (81). Thus while controlling the behavior of women is equally important to both writers, Rousseau represents women as moral threats, while More represents them as the bastions of moral culture. Because women are "naturally" better Christians than men, they are responsible, she insists, for instituting the kind of social reform that begins with Christian virtues. To the "women of rank" addressed in her Strictures, More explains that the "general state of civilized society depends. . .on the prevailing sentiments and habits of women, and on the nature and degree of the estimation in which they are held" (Works VI: 11).

More's insistence upon the doctrine of sexual virtues serves a more immediate function, as well. Rather than confining women to the home, it enables More to claim a public sphere for eighteenth-century women, separate from but perhaps superior to the one dominated by men. This, of course, is the realm of public charity, social work, and ministering to the poor. In Marinna, More describes Christian charity as a vocation particularly suited to women of rank. "I have often heard it regretted that ladies have no stated employment, no profession," she writes.

It is a mistake; charity is the calling of a lady; the care of the poor is her profession.



Men have little time or taste for details.  
 Women of fortune have abundant leisure, which  
 can no way be so properly or so pleasantly  
 filled up as in making themselves intimately  
 acquainted with the worth and the wants of  
 all within their reach (409).

In this sense, More's argument for the doctrine of sexual virtues is an early chapter in the problematical relationship between women's movements and "public service," which, as Mary Poovey has pointed out, gave women "a constructive vehicle for their talents and, in return, a heightened sense of their ability and self-worth" (9). In this commodification of feminine virtue, ideology plays a central role: women's "real value," More believes, is underwritten by Christianity and nurtured by her social position, which allows middle-class and upper-class women so much leisure time.

Given her emphasis upon Christian charity, one might assume that More would celebrate women's "natural" compassion. But perhaps because she was aware of the negative connotations with that term, she sought, instead, to reform it, to cultivate compassion so that it might serve a socially useful role. A major part of the Strictures, for example, is devoted to defending compassion against charges made by Wollstonecraft and others that it is a self-indulgent or "negative" virtue, proof of feminine weakness. "It is cruel to chill the precious sensibility of an ingenuous soul," she writes, "by treating with supercilious coldness and unfeeling ridicule every indication of a warm, tender, disinterested,

and enthusiastic spirit, as if it exhibited symptoms of a deficiency in understanding or in prudence" (Works VI: 175-76). Yet in these defenses, More is careful to distinguish between "natural" compassion, an unthinking responsiveness to suffering others, and compassion which might serve a socially useful role. The former, she admits, is a highly unstable moral impulse, and as such, a potential source of social disorder. As she writes in her poem "Sensibility," "'Tis not a gift peculiar to the good,/ 'Tis often but the virtue of the blood" which one must "divert to its proper course" (Works V: 381).<sup>5</sup> In order to raise compassion from this association with the body, More attempts to align it with Christian duty.

The Strictures, essentially a primer of women's charitable vocation, carefully separates compassion from the senses, and thus from the cult of sensibility with which it was easily allied. As More writes to her presumed audience of wealthy women, one should not proportion one's charity according to the "immediate effect which the distressed object produces upon her senses" (Works VI: 179). This kind of morality, in so far as it dependent upon "local circumstances and present events," cannot proceed from a sense of Christian duty (179). At its worst, in fact, such unthinking compassion is but a highly cultivated "species of feeling" which in some women "inevitably leads to the utter exclusion of all interest in the sufferings of others":

Instead of exercising their sensibility in  
the wholesome duty of relieving distress and

visiting scenes of sorrow, that sensibility is itself pleaded as a reason for their not being able to endure sights of woe, and for shunning the distress it should be exerted in removing. That exquisite sense of feeling which God implanted in the heart as a stimulus to quicken us in relieving the miseries of others, is thus introverted, and learns to consider self not as the agent, but the object of compassion. (186)

This false delicacy based upon pleasure is characterized, More claims, by a failure to part with one's money: it "reserves its selfish and ready tears for the more elegant and less expensive sorrows of the melting novel or the pathetic tragedy" (286-87). In contrast to this, true compassion involves a sense of sacrifice and even pain, as More makes clear in the following comment: "the most coarse and disgusting object," she claims, the "more uninviting and repulsive cases may be better tests of the principle on which we relieve, than those which abound in pathos and interest" (179).

While I shall return to the successes and limitations of More's moral program momentarily, it is helpful, perhaps, to initiate a comparison between her feminist impulses and those of Mary Wollstonecraft. Like Wollstonecraft, who built her argument for women's moral value on the importance of rational motherhood, More endows women with something other than an ornamental status. In fact, like the more radical

writer, she charges them with responsibility for the future of the state. To be sure, the power of women in this system is indirect--More defends the conservative notion that women's greatest "talent" is moral "influence"--but, arguably, the influence to be gained through charity work is no more or less secondary than the "power" of rational motherhood promoted by Wollstonecraft. Both writers, faced with a male-biased culture, were dependent upon such fifth-column tactics to re-value the roles to which women were confined.<sup>6</sup> Both writers, then, though in different ways, were compelled to intervene in cultural politics at the level of value-formation itself. That this intention is straightforward is apparent in the way More uses the language of value in conjunction with her argument for a doctrine of sexual virtues. While More believes (again with Wollstonecraft) that women should be educated, she argues that "to annihilate distinctions from which [a woman derives] advantages" is to "attempt innovations which would depreciate her real value" [emphasis added] (144).

From one point of view, then, More had a real and a positive political effect. By making the relief of suffering not only a duty, but a vocation which necessitates thoughtful public action, More helped to dispel charges that compassion is aligned with aestheticism or passivity, charges that had marked compassion as an unreliable emotion on which to base social reform. Simultaneously, through valorizing a measured compassion attributed largely to women, More helped to rescue women from their former moral position, and even to cast them

as the moral superiors of men. To the extent that her celebration of compassionate philanthropy extends to women a social valuable role, it is successful in displacing, or at least de-centering, male-biased ethical models. Yet More has gone down in history books as a raging anti-feminist. This characterization clearly has less to do with her attempt to re-value women's roles than with what those roles in practice imply. Generally speaking, while ministering to the poor softens and obscures women's apparently necessary exclusion from public life, such work is limited, as is More's Strictures, to "women of rank and fortune," to the Lady Bountifuls who alone have the necessary resources to relieve the suffering of the poor. Because More was not herself an aristocrat, she was unable--in direct ways, at least--to regulate the flow of money so as to serve some socially-useful end. As a writer, educator, and friend of politicians, she could, however, regulate the flow of knowledge. Only through examining the contours of those efforts, then, is it possible to understand the limitations of More's compassionate womanhood.

### **More's Moral Hierarchy**

As I have already suggested, a major difference between Wollstonecraft and More is that while the former analyzed ethical institutions, the latter sought to institutionalize ethics, or to promote a hierarchy of values set against "levellers" like Wollstonecraft. Under the guidance of William Wilberforce, and with the patronage of her wealthy

friends, More and her sisters established and regulated a series of Sunday Schools, Women's Benefit Societies, and Schools of Industry for the poor, beginning with one at Cheddar and, by the end of the century, extending across England (see Jones 151-171). Here, instructors taught pupils to read (but not to write), preached the value of Christian suffering, and distributed Hannah More's anti-jacobin works--her essays, dialogues, poems, and plays. Because of her involvement in the Evangelical movement, and despite the fact that More was a fairly successful playwright, novelist, and poet, she is best known as an educator, or simply as a pamphleteer.

The Cheap Repository Tracts, in fact, have sometimes been credited with stilling the resentment of increasingly restless and literate working class against an increasingly nervous aristocracy.<sup>7</sup> Whether or not this is true, they at least have that intention. As she explains in their preface, "an appetite for reading" had so increased "among the inferior ranks" that she felt compelled to provide more wholesome reading, so as to "abate their relish for those corrupt and inflammatory publications which the consequences of the French Revolution have so fatally been pouring in upon us" (Works I: advertisement, n.p.). This propaganda--or counter-propaganda--is interesting mostly for its coercion of the poor, which often resembles More's advice to women. Throughout this work, More encourages the poor to be willing objects of compassion who need only to trust in their superiors and to fashion a Christian heart. The tracts are

composed of dialogues between laborers or tradesmen, who, presumably through their own thinking, discover the flaws of the new philosophy.

"The History of Mr. Fantom," for example, is devoted to undermining the influence of Thomas Paine, whose Rights of Man was being widely distributed. In it, More represents Mr. Fantom as a would-be philosopher, enamored by Paine's book, and calling for "universal benevolence" through which all men, he believes, would be "good and happy" (Works I: 7). He is set against the more sensible Mr. Trueman, who eventually exposes Mr. Fantom as a vain, hypocritical, and self-centered man, as a presumptuous blowhard whose philosophy does not translate into socially useful action. Part of Trueman's argument against Fantom's "universal benevolence" is the doctrine of compensation to which More will repeatedly turn. Since "God is Love," asks Trueman, "do you think a being, whose very essence is love, would permit any misery among his children here, if it was not to be, in some way or another, or some where or other, for their good?" (17) In fact, More represents poverty as a challenge to two classes: as Mr. Trueman continues, "I suppose, God permits this misery partly to exercise the sufferers, and partly to try the prosperous [since] good men have an opportunity of lessening it" (17-18).<sup>8</sup>

This passage, like many others, exemplifies the close alliance between morality and party politics in eighteenth-century writing. Central to the politics of compassion is a kind of "trickle down" moral and economic theory, in which

the prosperity and morality of the upper and middle classes is represented as being directly beneficial to the laboring poor, even while the disparity between the classes is effectively maintained. This description of More's politics would be neither unfamiliar nor unwelcome to her. An anti-jacobin, she defended and passionately promoted a hierarchical society, in which class difference is intimately related to one's education and knowledge. As she writes in Essays on Various Subjects, a collection designed for "young ladies," "Various are the reasons why the greater part of mankind cannot apply themselves to arts or letters":

Particular studies are only suited to the capacities of particular persons. Some are incapable of applying to them from the delicacy of their sex. . . . Many are precluded by the narrowness of their education, and many by the straightness of their fortune. (Works II: 380)

Rather than rectify this situation, however, she celebrates it as part of God's plan:

The wisdom of God is wonderfully manifested in this happy and well-ordered diversity in the powers and properties of his creatures; since, by thus admirably suiting the agent to his action, the whole scheme of human affairs is carried on with the most agreeing and consistent economy, and no chasm is left for want of an object to fill it, exactly suited



to its nature. (Works II: 380)

While she believed that this disparity would disappear in heaven, at least throughout her earthly life, More was devoted to keeping it intact. This was to be accomplished, in part, through mobilizing an army of compassionate and socially-active women, whose interests were clearly those of the male ruling classes.

As Marilyn Butler reminds us, sympathies with the poor and oppressed are a hallmark of eighteenth-century writing, and are not necessarily a sign of radicalism, or even of what we might now call a "liberal" conscience (36). The morality of Cowper, for example, "made a strong appeal to the conservative, traditionally Christian strain in the gentry and prosperous middle class, which responded to the coming Evangelical movement"; it is telling, however, that members of these classes "sought a spiritual regeneration within individuals rather than disturbing the hierarchical order of things" (36). Given this, it is no accident that Cowper was More's favorite writer: "I have found what I have been looking for all my life," More writes to a friend, "a poet whom I can read on Sunday."<sup>9</sup> Wollstonecraft, too, admired Cowper, but for very different reasons. In the Rights of Woman, while making an argument against following the "blind authority" of men, she misquotes a line from The Task: "They are free--who will be free--!" (100).

Wollstonecraft and More's very different relationships to the existing social order are manifest in their appropriation of the discourse of sympathy as well. Because More wants so

desperately to preserve the notion of gender and class difference, the topos of "mutual sympathy" is a rare commodity in her work. As we saw in the writing of Smith and Wollstonecraft, mutual sympathy, unlike compassion, is a trope of similitude: if it is not exactly derived from equality, it at least reveals aspirations toward it. More's works, in contrast, are designed to maintain social difference, largely by representing such sentiments as Wollstonecraft's as a crime against nature and God. In Village Politics, for example, More portrays an argument between Tom, who, having recently read The Rights of Man, claims that "all men are equal" (Works I: 362), and Jack, a man of "good sense" who points out the sacrilege of such aspirations: "If that's thy talk, Tom," he responds, "thou dost quarrel with Providence, and not with government. For the woman is below her husband, and the children are below their mother, and the servant is below his master" (363). In More's strictly hierarchical world, there seems to be little room for a vision of the social order not dependent upon class and gender lines.

Any representation of mutual sympathy in More's work is thus particularly striking, and usually associated with conversation, or with "appropriate" converse between educated members of the same social class. Much as in Smith's writing, the model for sympathy is the social club, or "little societies". In "The Bas Bleu, or Conversation," for example, More refers to her own social circle, the Blue Stockings, a floating pool of female writers, patronesses, scholars, and

political wives: Elizabeth Vesey, Fanny Burney, Elizabeth Montagu, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Elisabeth Macaulay, Charlotte Lennox, and others. Usual guests included Johnson, Burke, Garrick, and Reynolds--all of whom are mentioned in the poem. In More's eyes, this mixed society (which necessarily met at private homes) was "composed of persons distinguished, in general, for their rank, talents, or respectable character" (Works V: 360). In our eyes, it was composed of London's wealthy and powerful, its social and intellectual elite.

Yet even in this poem, "mutual sympathy" is simply revealed to be a false promise of social coherence to which women should not aspire. The poem itself is a mock-heroic, a paean to the civilizing powers of Conversation, "Soft polisher of rugged man" and "Refiner of the social plan" (Works V: 368). It is addressed to Elizabeth Vesey, the much-hailed London hostess who is rumored to have kept conversation flowing by placing her guests in a changing series of intimate groups, but, more generally, to the learned women who composed the Blue Stockings as such. Given the education of the women involved, one might expect More to sing the praises of their wit, knowledge, and social skills. That she does, but, significantly, throughout the poem, women's public display of knowledge--or, more specifically, her attraction to the power of wit--is represented as a danger which even these wealthy and powerful women should avoid.

More's gentle satire turns upon an implicit set of values, which asserts, as we have seen, that women are to desire

"moral influence" but not public power. This division between the private and the public, each associated with a different sex, can be extended to knowledge as well. As she puts it in another context, "That kind of knowledge which is fitted rather for home consumption than foreign exportation, is peculiarly adapted to women" (Works VI: 137). Whenever knowledge becomes, like money, a form of public power, it is, according to More, inappropriate for women to display. In this poem, the analogy between public power, knowledge, and a masculine sphere apparent in the preceding comment is cast into a moral allegory whose protagonist is "Conversation." As More writes, somewhat self-ironically, "Ah, wherefore wise, if none must hear?"

Our intellectual ore must shine,  
 Not slumber, idly, in the mine.  
 Let Education's moral mint  
 The noblest images imprint;  
 Let taste her curious touchstone hold  
 To try if standard be the gold;  
 But 'tis thy commerce, Conversation,  
 Must give it use by circulation;  
 That noblest commerce of mankind,  
 Whose precious merchandise is Mind! (Works V: 368)

Because this form of "Conversation" is closely associated with an inappropriate form of public power and personal display, suggested through an ongoing analogy between conversation and trade, the poem culminates in Conversation's humiliating public defeat. Intoxicated by the pleasure of

"Wit" and the desire for approval, Conversation sacrifices its "real" power, "Virtue."

Within this moral allegory, the trope of mutual sympathy plays a central role. Associated with wit, it symbolizes the false promise of social coherence that is devoted to a principle of worldly pleasure, as opposed to Christian sacrifice. Like the poem as a whole, More's representation of mutual sympathy is in the mock-heroic mode. It is thus gradually represented as a false sense of union or triumph, derived from an exaggerated sense of one's "worth" and "powers:" "Enlightened spirits!," she writes to her female counterparts, "you, who know,/ What charms from polished converse flow":

Speak, for you can, the pure delight  
When kindling sympathies unite;  
When correspondent tastes impart  
Communion sweet from heart to heart;  
You ne'er the cold gradations need  
Which vulgar soul to union lead;  
No dry discussion to unfold

The meaning ere well 'tis told: (Works V: 369-70)

Here, More represents mutual sympathy as the product of similar tastes, as the peculiar and almost-spiritual pleasure of an intellectual elite. Sympathy is portrayed as a kind of "communion" that promises to transcend hierarchy and the "cold gradations" of language. In the next passage, More changes the metaphor and draws upon a common trope in eighteenth-century aesthetic theory. Sympathy is compared to

the even-more mysterious powers of electro-magnetism, where its success is dependent not simply upon similar tastes, but upon "kindred souls [that] demand alliance":

Each in the other joys to find  
 The image answering to his mind.  
 But sparks electric only strike  
 On souls electrical alike;  
 The flash of intellect expires,  
 Unless it meet congenial fires: (Works V: 370)

So far, More has drawn upon virtually every major trope of sympathetic response. In the next stanza, however, she exposes these as pretensions of an intellectual elect, largely by comparing the would-be mysteries and pleasures of sympathetic "communion" to those hailed by a less-elevated social group, the masons.

The language to th' elect alone  
 Is, like the mason's mystery, known;  
 In vain th' unerring sign is made  
 To him who is not of the trade. (Works V: 370)

The freemasons, of course, were members of an artisan class whose pro-revolutionary leanings would be anathema to More and her circle.<sup>10</sup> Through this deflating comparison between that society of rabble-rousers and the aspirations of educated women, More is able both to diminish the attractions of mutual sympathy--it is, after all, connected with a clearly vulgar form of trade--and to hint at its dangers as a potential form of social disorder.<sup>11</sup>

Since this poem is conducted through the mock-heroic mode,

it is perhaps an overstatement to say that through "Bas Bleu" More condemns mutual sympathy. The trope is never taken seriously enough for to do so. Instead, through her ironic portrayal, More succeeds in both de-valuing the trope of "commerce of feeling," and in representing it as a secular and exclusively masculine enterprise to which women should never aspire. Given this, it is fair to say that, however different its tone and form, More's poem turns on the same constellation of concerns apparent in the writings of Smith and Wollstonecraft: sympathy as a form of social coherence; sympathy as a political trope; the domestication of women; and what is considered to be "appropriate" self-representation.

Yet unlike Wollstonecraft and Smith, More is caught in something of a discursive double bind. On the one hand, with Smith, she wants to preserve the relationship between women and the private virtues; on the other hand, with Wollstonecraft, she wants to extend to women the social value and presence granted to middle-class men. Her problematical solution is to insist upon the importance of women in mixed circles, but to thwart any attempt toward self-representation that would threaten the precarious value of their admittedly secondary role. At the end of the poem, having described, as I mentioned, the defeat of women's aspirations toward "equal commerce," More calls upon the "lettered and the fair" to practice their one true "talent." This mysterious and peculiarly feminine power--"This charm, this witchcraft"--is silence, or "attention," through which, she claims, the

social circle is sustained.

Mute angel, yes; thy looks dispense,  
 The silence of intelligence;  
 Thy graceful form I well discern,  
 In act to listen and to learn. (Works V: 371)

Silence, then, is represented as the most appropriate public posture for women, as the best proof of their "intelligence," and as their most valued and most valuable public role.

In the lexicon of modern feminist theory, More represents women in either of two too-familiar roles: as the passive consumer of a masculine world, whose power is real but indirect, or as the marginalized hysteric, whose power is the power of resistance to a masculine symbolic order. In eighteenth-century terms, however, More grants women the power of influence, which, as we know, turns upon one's ability to serve as the charming but moral companions of eighteenth-century men. This secondary position was, perhaps, inevitable for a woman in More's social circle, who was dependent upon the graces of Johnson, Garrick, and others to arrange and promote her writing career. Alternatively, assuming that even some members of the Blue Stocking group practiced what More preached, it is easy to understand why Johnson, Burke, and Garrick found so much pleasure in their drawing rooms. Mute angels are a valuable commodity, particularly for aging actors and practicing poets. But More's advice to women cannot easily be reduced to proof of her own self-interest--at least not directly. Like many of More's strategies to increase the moral value of women, this



celebration of silence is a compensatory gesture, which can be read in several ways. One might interpret it as a manifestation of More's Christian consciousness, where, as we have seen, women must avoid a comparatively degraded public sphere so as to ensure their own moral superiority. Or, more suspiciously, one might argue that it is meant to atone for a world in which women had so few opportunities to practice "commerce of feeling" that "commerce of feeling" is subsequently de-valued, and represented as a threat to a "better" social order, which is then underwritten by Christian values. In either case, it is significant that More could only ensure the compassionate qualities of women--could only prove their moral superiority--by pointing to women's amiable silence, and calling for their retreat from any public aspirations. This suggests that were she to admit the possibility of mutual sympathy between women and men, her moral hierarchy would be shaken at its foundations, and her carefully constructed argument for the moral superiority of women, which requires the notion of difference, would tremble along with it.

### The Wrongs of Woman

For More, then, there can be no mutual sympathy between men and women, or between members of two different classes. On the whole, she is suspicious of the notion, believing it to be, at worst, a romantic illusion of equality that may erupt in social disorder, or, at best, a sentimental notion perpetuated by "romantic" novels. Often, the two objections

are indistinguishable. In her Essays, for example, More warns her young audience against looking to "pernicious reading" for a model of female friendship. Here, she claims, a "violent intimacy ensues" between two young people, or, she continues, "to speak the language of sentiment, an intimate union of souls immediately takes place, which is wrought to the highest pitch by a secret correspondence" (Works II: 359). With surprising consistency throughout More's work, and even in reference to the relationship between the female members of the same class, the idea of "feeling with" is trivialized or simply dismissed.<sup>12</sup> There exists at least a deep analogy between this rejection of "feeling with" and More's attitude toward the laboring poor, who, as we have seen, constitute a largely nameless source of potential social upheaval that middle-class men and women, she believes, must together attempt to regulate and control.

For Wollstonecraft, on the other hand, as for many other British radicals, the poor are genuine victims of the asymmetrical social order that More would protect. Thus for Wollstonecraft, progressive sexual and party politics--one focusing upon gender, and the other, upon class--are closely interwoven. This relationship between sexual and party politics, as we might expect, is often represented in the language of sympathy. In her description of life as a governess for a wealthy family, for example, Wollstonecraft laments the absence of "mutual sympathy" between members of different classes. Though a "young mind looks round for love and friendship," she writes, "love and friendship fly from

poverty: expect them not if you are very poor" (Rights of Woman 74). Smith, of course, had made much the same point in his description of how poverty places the poor man "out of the sight of mankind" which has "scarce any fellow-feeling with the misery and distress he suffers" (TMS 51). Their comments, however, are of two different orders. Whereas Smith's example of the poor man is meant to illustrate--even to naturalize--the idea that the sympathetic imagination more easily passes to the empowered, Wollstonecraft's is a complaint, and a call for justice. Recognizing that class and sex differences constitute an impediment to "mutual sympathy" that cannot be rectified without basic economic and educational parity, Wollstonecraft consistently argues that "power" is a real phenomenon taking place not merely in and through the realm of values (and therefore confined to the minds of men) but in and through concrete social institutions by which women, like other groups, had been created, de-valued, excluded, and oppressed.

In her last novel, Maria, or, The Wrongs of Woman, Wollstonecraft's analysis of the social condition of women begun in Mary is expanded to include the experience of women who are also members of the laboring poor.<sup>13</sup> Although as in all her work, her goal is to describe "the misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society" (73), The Wrongs of Woman is built upon the stories of Maria and Jemima, two women of different classes. Their conditions are said to be "equally oppressive," although necessarily taking "different forms"

(74). While much of this novel is straightforwardly polemical, and its purpose to expose the inequities of an arcane legal system under which both women suffer, the aspect of the novel I will focus upon here concerns the relation of Maria and Jemima. Given the very different experiences of these two women, this relationship is initially fraught with tension, but by the end of the novel, Maria and Jemima are represented as fast and loyal friends. Sympathy is the heroine of this connection, or, to switch metaphors, the "bridge" through which these tensions are (presumably) resolved.

The Wrongs of Woman opens with its central character, Maria, having been locked up in an asylum by her husband, George Venables. As we later find out, the ruthless and degenerate Venables first spent all his wife's inheritance and through his neglect and abuse, drove her away; because their child was heir to a considerable fortune, he subsequently hunted down Maria, kidnapped their four-month-old daughter, and had his wife committed. Maria finds herself placed under the care of the second character, Jemima, a former prostitute turned "jailer" who initially believes that Maria is mad. Gradually, and largely through Maria's efforts to create a bond between the two women, Jemima learns to trust Maria, and Maria to respect Jemima. In fact, Jemima first serves as a liaison between Maria and a fellow-prisoner, Darnford, who will become Maria's lover. Upon his release, Jemima helps Maria to escape. While that love affair apparently ends in Maria's abandonment and attempted suicide,

Jemima locates the lost child, for whose sake Maria determines to live.

The bond between Maria and Jemima is, as I suggested, a gradual process. Given that Jemima had been "sophisticated into misanthropy" (80), or had learned to dislike and distrust others by the harshness she had met in the world, she is at first unresponsive to Maria. Largely through exercising "fortitude" (78) and other behaviors connected with appropriate self-representation, however, Maria is able to convince Jemima that she is not mad. As Wollstonecraft writes, "The manner, rather than the expostulations, of Maria, made a slight suspicion dart into [Jemima's] mind with corresponding sympathy which she could not at that moment examine more minutely" (78). This "corresponding sympathy"--the faint recognition of a similarly rational creature--is (paradoxically perhaps) strengthened by Jemima's ability to identify with Maria's grief at the loss of her child. As Wollstonecraft puts it, when Jemima hears the story of how Maria's child "had been torn from her, even while she was discharging the tenderest maternal office, the woman awoke in a bosom long estranged from feminine emotions, and Jemima determined to alleviate. . .the suffering of a wretched mother" (80). Later, Maria's love affair with Darnford exposes Jemima to the "domestic affections," an aspect of "humanity" that she had never seen. Under the influence of their apparent love, where "every sense was harmonized to joy and social extacy," Jemima first learns to sympathize with pleasure, rather than pain:

So animated, indeed, were their accents of tenderness, in discussing what, in other circumstances, would have been commonplace subjects, that Jemima felt, with surprise, a tear of pleasure trickling down her rugged cheeks. She wiped it away, half ashamed; and when Maria kindly enquired the cause. . . she owned that it was the first tear social enjoyment had ever drawn from her. She seemed indeed to breathe more freely; the cloud of suspicion was cleared away from her brow; she felt herself, for once in her life, treated like a fellow-creature. (101)

Finally, the effect of this scene was so powerful that Jemima, "softened by the air of confidence that breathed around her" (101) felt free to break her long silence, to relate her own story, and thus through her self-representation to provoke sympathy in turn.

From a feminist perspective, Jemima's account is in some ways the most significant part of this book. As far as I know, it is one of the few eighteenth-century accounts of a poor woman's life that--if I may borrow the language of sympathy--genuinely intends to command respect, not just pity, for its victim.<sup>14</sup> Through it, Maria learns that Jemima shares her desire for independence, or for a society that affords more opportunities for women, and does not punish its women for the mistakes of its men. Herself an illegitimate child, Jemima was raped by her master, then thrown out on the

streets. Ashamed and forced to have an abortion, Jemima begged, prostituted, and, eventually, became a housekeeper for an elderly and rather profligate man near Hampstead, where she took it upon herself to read, and, already outside "proper society," benefit from conversations between men from which more respectable women would have been excluded. Largely through self-education, she acquired what "might be termed a moral sense" (111) and desired to return to the "respectable part of society" (111). When the master died, however, his family refused to give her a recommendation, and she was once again thrust upon her own resources. After another series of trials and tribulations, she became a jailer, where, in solitude, she at least had independence, even though she was complicitous in serving the interests of the class she had learned to despise.

While it is possible to discern differences between the events of Maria's life and those in Jemima's, Wollstonecraft wants to make broad thematic connections which exemplify their shared status as creatures living under "partial laws." For this reason, both are represented as "outlaws" who, excluded from rights and privileges, are forced to rely upon their own judgment or, in some cases, to take the law into their own hands. Thus Maria is, as she says, "hunted like criminal" (196) and Jemima quite literally is one: "I became a thief from principle," she says (118). Throughout the novel the legal system is represented as one-sided and corrupt, as we see when Maria pleads her case before an unsympathetic judge. The fact that Jemima becomes Maria's benevolent

"jailer" who is nevertheless able, unlike the men around her, to recognize Maria's innocence finally suggests that according to Wollstonecraft and despite popular opinion, women have a more refined sense of justice than men.

But the most interesting thing about their shared status as "outsiders" is that it quite literally creates the conditions for the possibility of sympathy; it enables and promotes their desire to create "fellow-feeling" by turning to one another. For Jemima, as I have suggested, this means learning from Maria the lesson of humanity, a social impulse which had been "numbed" at birth. In language that anticipates Frankenstein, Jemima complains bitterly to Maria and Darnford, "Still, what should induce me to be the champion for suffering humanity?--Who ever risked any thing for me?--Who ever acknowledged me to be a fellow-creature?" (119). For Maria, on the other hand, it means learning to respect a former thief and prostitute, when, as she admits, she was once "mortified at being compelled to consider them as my fellow-creatures, as if an ape had claimed kindred with me" (168). The asylum where they are both imprisoned is thus less a microcosm of the outside world than it the space of their marginalization. By virtue of that--and that alone--they confront their prejudices, and identify the other as a fellow-creature, worthy of their respect.

Given Wollstonecraft's emphasis upon sympathy between members of different classes, it would appear that Wollstonecraft has been able to accomplish what Smith and More would not, that is, to appropriate the discourse of



sympathy in the service of radical politics that transcend or resolve class and cultural differences. The novel, however, cannot support such a utopian reading. And given Wollstonecraft's own assumptions, we should not expect it to do so. All of Wollstonecraft's work is directed toward establishing moral and economic "autonomy" for women, which, in this case, means relative independence from male-biased moral and legal systems through which they are as individuals oppressed. In The Wrongs of Woman, for example, Jemima's narrative exemplifies the "evils of poverty" upon the character of a would-be autonomous woman. Recognizing Jemima's worth and desire, and, reasoning from her own experience of suffering to Jemima's very different one, Maria is able to support Jemima's aspirations. Yet individual "autonomy" does not translate into equality, even between these two women. As Janet Todd points out, Jemima never pretends to be the equal of Maria--in fact, once released from prison, she insists upon remaining as Maria's servant (1986, 112). Thus class hierarchy is modified, its edges blurred, but the master/servant relationship seemingly dictated by birth remains intact.

It is possible to see this hierarchical structure by attending to Wollstonecraft's representation of sympathy, as well. As in *Smith*, the possibility of sympathy is connected to one's appropriate self-representation and identification with a principle of pleasure and power. This aspect of sympathetic response is played out through Jemima; after she is introduced to "human converse," the foundation of sympathy

(119), sympathy works as a principle of upward mobility, with Maria serving as the point, or as the moral character, to which Jemima should aspire. Maria's relationship to sympathy is a bit more complicated. While Maria generally shows compassion for Jemima and thus treats her as a "fellow-creature," thereby enabling Jemima's rise to humanity, Maria has no corresponding desire to emulate the unfortunate woman. From one point of view, then, their relationship "fails"; because it is largely one-sided, it cannot approximate the "mutual sympathy" celebrated in Smith, for whom the most valued form of sympathetic response is a kind of mutual admiration society between two virtuous men.<sup>15</sup> On the basis of either Smith's model or More's, the hierarchical structure of sympathy between Maria and Jemima is neither effectively dissipated nor resolved.

Yet perhaps that is not the most important issue in the text, which, like all of Wollstonecraft's work, is necessarily interventionist. In the Rights of Woman, as we have seen, Wollstonecraft sought to displace--or at least to dislodge--both Smith's system of sympathetic response, and the model of compassionate womanhood promoted by More, since in each case, woman's social role is connected and confined to compassion. In order to do that, she attempted to extend the possibility of moral judgment to women. Similarly, in The Wrongs of Woman, she repeats those sentiments in an argument that women must be allowed "positive virtue" (153). Explaining that she had yielded to her husband's sexual overtures out of "sheer compassion," she argues that "Men,

more effectually to enslave us, may inculcate this partial morality, and lose sight of virtue in subdividing it into the duties of particular stations" but that "the first duty of women is to themselves, to their own passion and imagination" (153). This positive virtue, however, is never enough. As we have seen in the Rights of Woman, Wollstonecraft was forced to ground the moral value of women in their role as rational mothers. The Wrongs of Woman simply dramatizes that moral claim.

In order to emphasize the importance of women's maternal role, throughout the Wrongs of Woman Wollstonecraft portrays a society in which this role is thwarted. For this reason, Maria's child--not "liberty" or "equality"--is represented as being the most valuable commodity in the novel, and is the catalyst upon which all the action turns. George, for example, symbolizes not only the bad husband, but the bad father. He had Maria confined in order to acquire the child, because the latter was endowed with a considerable inheritance. Maria, in turn, "tortured by maternal apprehension" (75) desires to escape because she fears for her daughter, and wants to fulfill the role that only a mother could: "who would watch her with a mother's tenderness, a mother's self-denial?" (75). Similarly, it is through identifying with Maria's loss that the "woman awoke" in Jemima, and she first experiences a sense of injustice (80), and it is largely because she did not have a mother that her own trials and tribulations are explained. Looking back, she says to Maria and Darnford, "I cannot help

attributing the greater part of my misery, to the misfortune of having been thrown into the world without the grand support of life--a mother's affection" (106). It is through their mutual concern for the missing child, in fact, that Maria and Jemima are at last brought together, and their escape effected. After hearing Jemima's story, Maria is convinced that "Jemima's humanity had rather been benumbed than killed" (120) and she convinces her to take action on behalf of her child: "With your heart, and such dreadful experience, can you lend your aid to deprive my babe of a mother's tenderness, a mother's care?"

In the name of God, assist me to snatch her from destruction! Let me but give her an education--let me but prepare her body and mind to encounter the ills which await her sex, and I will teach her to consider you as her second mother, and herself as the prop of your age. (121)

At the end of the novel, moreover, when Maria, apparently suffering from Darnford's betrayal, attempts to commit suicide, Jemima locates the child, and Maria vows to live.

This theme of the threatened child which can only be saved by a mother's love underscores Wollstonecraft's earlier argument in the Rights of Woman that women, in their maternal role, are the most fundamental stabilizing force in society. Conversely, the child is represented as a redemptive force through which a misanthropic and male-dominated society may be softened, if not overthrown. In fact, according to

Wollstonecraft, it is because Maria and Jemima share this perception of the mother-child relationship, and not because of some intrinsic ability to "compassion-ate," that they are able to "sympathize" that is, to share a common bond. Because they had lived outside the conventions of society, Maria and Jemima are thrown together in a common space; because they share the same values, however, Maria and Jemima have a common goal, to protect the endangered child which is, in the end, a symbol for the endangered status of the social itself. At the same time, the mother-child relationship is quite literally represented as the purgative through which a male-dominated society is dispelled. At the end of the novel, Maria is lying on her would-be deathbed, poisoned, and calling out for a father: "May I find a father where I am going!" Yet when Jemima--the "second mother"--appears with the child, "Maria started off the bed, and fainted.--Violent vomiting ensued" (203). When the child calls out to her, Maria goes through an "an agonizing struggle," then, we are told, exclaimed: "The conflict is over!--I will live for my child!'" (203).

Because the mother-child relationship is so central to the common bond between Maria and Jemima, and because that is portrayed as being central to future of the social itself, sympathy in this novel cannot be read in familiar terms. At stake here is not simply, I would argue, the power of female friendship, or even the power of compassion for the sufferings of women of two different classes. It is, instead, the power of rational motherhood, which Wollstonecraft had

posited as woman's sole claim to social existence, superseding the relationship between two virtuous men. In this novel it is represented as the concern of all women, including members of the working class. The effect of this universalization is that while Wollstonecraft is not able to overthrow the hierarchy intrinsic to the logic of sympathy, she is able, temporarily, to displace models such as Rousseau's, and to situate women in the center of a culture from which they had been displaced.

In this chapter, I have brought together sexual and party politics in order to make a single point: in eighteenth-century writing by women, sympathy supports at least two distinct but interrelated ideologies, both of which (in theory at least) have feminist intentions. In her complete distrust of "feeling with" as a principle of social coherence, More differs from Wollstonecraft, who, in alliance with other British radicals, is interested in erasing, or at least de-naturalizing, cultural and social differences. This is most apparent in their representation of class, since, as I have throughout this work insisted, sympathy is part of the symbolic system that articulates and supports a largely middle-class moral and political theory, marking who or what is to remain outside the social as such. At the same time, I have argued that precisely because the discourse of sympathy was so pervasive, both More and Wollstonecraft were forced to rely upon a compensatory strategy to endow women with moral worth. In order to counter the exclusionary practices of moral and political writers from Smith to Rousseau, both

writers simply extend the social and political significance of the private realm itself, one by emphasizing the importance of rational motherhood, and the other by celebrating the virtues of public service.

How different, then, are Wollstonecraft and More? Because both women write within and against the discourse of sympathy to assert women's social value, from one point of view, the logic of their respective strategies is uncannily similar. Both, for example, in alliance with Smith, promote a vision of the social based upon models of the nuclear family, which necessitates the (inevitably hierarchical) family structure. Both associate the value of women with non-paying social reform. And both, in different ways, insist that a woman's body, as a natural source of compassion or as the original site of sympathetic bonds, can serve as source of all future social good. In compensation for a culture in which the activities of men were valued more than those of women, each, in alliance with a particular and essentially religious ideology, sought to establish a connection between women and a particular social role, where philanthropy and rational motherhood were simultaneously endowed with equal or even superior moral value than the public roles of men. However radical those arguments were in their own time, I would like to offer the possibility that both writers were instrumental in creating and even naturalizing associations which remain foundational to some types of feminist theory and practice today.

## Notes to Chapter Four

1. There are several and often conflicting traditions of poststructuralist feminism (see Owen), most of which nevertheless share a single goal: as Spivak puts it, to re-write "great male texts" so that "there is new material for the grasping of the production and determination of literature within the general production and determination of consciousness and society. After all, the people who produce literature, male and female, are also moved by general ideas of world and consciousness to which they cannot give a name" (81). I am working within that tradition most indebted to Foucault. For accounts of the relationship between feminism and Foucault, see Armstrong; Weedon; and the introduction to Feminism and Foucault by Diamond and Quinby.

2. This view is summarized in Todd's preface to her annotated bibliography of Wollstonecraft (xxiv): "Hannah More, the most famous of the Bluestockings, wanted partial reform in the position of women, consonant with their divinely appointed subordination. . . .Wollstonecraft, however, wanted a radical change in agreement with her religious opinion, that women, like men had immortal souls to create."

3. Pocock draws attention to the importance of "manners" in Burke's response to the French Revolution. Burke felt that "the ancien regime is a microcosm of the history of Europe; feudal conquest, clerical and political organization, commercial and cultural growth; all is organized around a historical edifice of manners, and it is the structure of European civility which the Revolution is in the process of destroying" (199). I would extend his thesis to explain anti-feminist responses to Wollstonecraft's work. In fact, one can see this same phenomenon in Stone, who comments that Mary Wollstonecraft's "passionate claim to sexual equality, together with her sympathy for the French Revolution and her irregular personal life, merely alienated the support of all but the most tolerant of men" (227).

4. Marilyn Butler has described Evangelicalism as a social movement which "sought a spiritual regeneration within individuals rather than by disturbing the present hierarchical order of things" (36). More is certainly within that tradition, and that is all I am concerned with here, but More's relationship to Evangelicalism is considerably more complex. See Jones 97-102 and Schnorrenberg 199 for the Evangelicals' attitude toward women.

5. When referring to Hannah More's poems, I will provide only the volume and page numbers, since line numbers are not given in the Harper edition.

6. It is amusing that, in arguing for women's moral influence, More appeals to the example of Cicero who, with Fulvia's influence, had defeated Catiline's conspiracy



against him, only to fall himself by her vengeance against him years later. "We read of the greatest orator of antiquity, that the wisest plans which it had cost him years to frame, a woman could overturn in a single day" (Works VI: 11). As the editor points out, moreover, when Cicero's head was brought to her, "she pierced with a bodkin that tongue which had so often delighted listening senators" (11n). One wonders if More could have found some more appropriate example of woman's god-given talent.

7. On the distribution and influence of Hannah More's political writing, see Collins 78-81; Altick 68-75; Thompson 1963, 56-9; Pederson; Smith 91-96; and Gaull 47-9. Concerning the huge number of More's Religious Tracts that were put into circulation, Altick writes that "There had never been anything like it in the history of books" (75).

8. In the context of the 1790s and the English government's stern reaction against potential revolution at home, More's attitude toward the laboring poor she strove to educate is consonant with Burke's feeling that "where a man is incapable of receiving Benefit through his reason, he must be made to receive it thro' his fears. Here the Magistrate must stand in the place of the Professor. They who cannot or will not be taught, must be coerced" (qtd. in Olivia Smith 74).

9. See Jones 90 on More's relationship to Cowper. Although she did not know him, they had mutual friends and admired each other's work.

10. It was generally known that the masons were one of the many social clubs throughout Europe where radical ideas first took root and were promoted, although there is some disagreement about their influence in England. My point here is simply that More is drawing upon a popular symbol of social disorder, and not that the masons in England were a genuine revolutionary force. See Britton 5; Thompson 1963, 168; and Hunt 113, who suggests that much of the revolution's imagery was drawn from masonic sources.

11. More's representation of trade in this poem has less, I think, to do with what McVeagh has identified as the anti-mercantilist movement in late-eighteenth century writing than it does with her desire to cast "Conversation" as a form of public power, much like trade, which women should avoid.

12. To be fair, later in this same essay (364) she claims "that women are as capable of as faithful and as durable friendship as any of the other sex," and even goes so far as to claim that people do not think so because "the recorders" of famous male friendships were men, but she never uses the language of sympathy in that context Works II: 364. See also Works VI: 174, where the language of sympathy is involved in her description of "good-nature" where "genuine sympathy" is represented as a mode of behavior, much like charity, which gives rise to self-sacrifice and Christian good works.

13. Yet in the middle of this story, Wollstonecraft includes a short discussion between the three characters upon the evils of poverty, and upon the faulty solutions proffered by modern authors, including ones such as Burke and More. These, "insisting that it is the lot of the majority to be oppressed in this life, kindly turn them over to another, to rectify the false weights and measures of this, as the only way to justify the dispensations of Providence" (115). All agree that it is more important to open one's heart, than one's purse (119), to establish conditions for moral growth which the novel itself exemplifies.

14. This, of course, is a generalization which is not easily supported. One apparent exception is the work of Defoe, whose Moll Flanders and Roxana have been praised for their realistic portrayals of women oppressed by social circumstances beyond their control. Yet Defoe's portrayal of women must be qualified. As Watt argues of Moll Flanders, "some of [her] actions may be very similar to the picaresque, but the feeling evoked by them is of a much more complete sympathy and identification: author and reader alike cannot but take her and her problems much more seriously" (94). There is no question of satire or humor in Wollstonecraft's portrayal of Jemima. See also Starr on the story of Roxana, where he argues that the purpose of the novel is to "'move the Pity, even of those that abhor the Crime'" (76).

15. Significantly, Wollstonecraft does use the language of mutual sympathy to portray Maria's relationship with Darnford, another hero modeled after St. Preux, where "mutual sympathy" is eventually proved to be an illusion. Although the novel is unfinished, there are clear indications of his moral failure. See, for example 192, where this is foreshadowed: "With Darnford she did not taste uninterrupted felicity; there was a volatility in his manner which often distressed her; but love gladdened the scene; besides, he was the most tender, sympathizing creature in the world. A fondness for the sex often gives an appearance of humanity to the behavior of men, who have small pretensions to the reality; and they seem to love others, when they are only pursuing their own gratification."

## Conclusion

### Sympathy, Gender, and the Writing of Value

"How I would like to believe  
in tenderness...." Sylvia Plath,  
"The Moon and the Yew Tree"

In the late-eighteenth century, as we have seen, the discourse of sympathy played a key role in arguments for and against the importance of women in largely middle-class movements for social reform. In this chapter, I want to focus upon the problematical relationship between sympathy, gender and the writing of value within a contemporary context. Consequently, I have almost completely ignored some one hundred and fifty years of history, during which, it could have been illustrated, both motherhood and philanthropy were solidified into arguments for woman's moral superiority. At the same time, sympathy and compassion, much like the women who were thought to embody them, became confined to the "household of the emotions," now unequivocally set against the presumably "corrupt" world of commerce and trade.<sup>1</sup> Yet, as in the eighteenth-century, the idea that the domestic should be valued more than the public world, as Judith Newton has pointed out, is largely a compensatory gesture, constructed in the early Victorian era (the 1830s and 40s) "by middle-class women for each other" (127).<sup>2</sup> It is possible to argue, then, that throughout the nineteenth

century, the discourse of sympathy was very much alive, and that women continued to challenge the hierarchy of values implicit in it.

From another point of view, however, this challenge did little more than to legitimize women's secondary moral status. Even while women such as Sarah Ellis were insisting upon the value of women's "disinterested kindness," they were also solidifying the association between women and compassion which was soon to be cast into theories of biological development. By the third quarter of the nineteenth-century, for example, Charles Darwin was able to maintain that the moral differences between men and women are the result of "natural selection." In the Descent of Man (1871) he writes that "Woman seems to differ from man in mental disposition, chiefly in her greater tenderness and less selfishness" (qtd. in Agonitio 260). Notably, the "evidence" for this claim is drawn from representations of women in popular travel books: "and this holds good," he continues, "even with savages, as shewn by a well-known passage in Mungo Park's Travels, and by statements made by many other travellers" (260). In this way, anthropology and ideology were increasingly allied; it is thus not surprising to see Darwin attribute these "womanly" moral qualities to "maternal instincts": "Woman, owing to her maternal instincts, displays these qualities towards her infants in an eminent degree; therefore it is likely that she would extend them towards her fellow-creatures" (260). These caring "instincts," in turn, are represented as being morally "superior" to the equally "natural" qualities of men. "Man is

the rival of other men," writes Darwin, "he delights in competition, and this leads to ambition which passes too easily into selfishness. These latter qualities seem to be his natural and unfortunate birthright" (260). Yet Darwin's flattering portrayal of women's morality should not be taken at face value. As he continues, "It is generally admitted that with women the powers of intuition, of rapid perception, and perhaps of imitation, are more strongly marked than in man; but some, at least, of these faculties are characteristic of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilization" (260). In Darwin's account of moral difference, then, the hierarchy of values implicit in the discourse of sympathy has simply been re-cast as a fact of "natural" evolution itself.

This too-holy marriage between morality and biology--a marriage, as we have seen, which goes back to eighteenth-century medical texts--has, not surprisingly created a problem for modern-day feminists. Many twentieth-century feminists, for example, have attempted to explain moral differences between men and women on the basis of sociological, psychological, or historical factors. Prominent among these is a theorist I have already mentioned, Nancy Chodorow, who argues that, because women have traditionally served as the primary caretakers of children, and because boys and girls identify with the mother in different ways, girls are more likely than boys to define themselves in terms of relationships, to see themselves in terms of their ability to "care." While this explanation is undoubtedly an improvement

over Darwin's--or Freud's--account of moral difference, because it relies upon a gender-specific theory of moral development, it nevertheless can be charged with a kind of cultural essentialism which obscures the differences between men and women,<sup>3</sup> and correspondingly, the importance of structures outside the nuclear family in moral development itself.<sup>4</sup>

This issue is all the more troubling when one considers the effect of Chodorow's argument upon some feminist theorists. Although Chodorow warns that her descriptions of male and female moral development are "structural and statistical truths" that should not be confused with "prescription," that has not always been the case. This is in part due to the tremendous influence of Carol Gilligan's psychoanalytically-based study of women's moral development, which argues that women possess a different moral structure, "a different voice" which should serve as the basis of ethical reform. Within literary criticism, as we saw in Chapter II, both men and women have appropriated the association between women and compassion in attempts to re-value the writing of women, which for the most part had been dismissed or ignored. Within philosophy, the Chodorow-Gilligan thesis is perhaps even more important. A partial list of the men and women who seek to posit an "alternative" to the "totalizing" and clearly masculinist moral systems of Kant, Hegel, and others by drawing upon Gilligan would include Mary Katzenstein, David Laitin, Annette C. Baier, Barbara Houston, Katherine Morgan, and Sarah Ruddick 1988--who argues that "maternal thinking," or what she calls

"attentive love," should be extended in "the public realm": "we must work...to make the preservation and growth of all children a work of public conscience and legislation" (349-50).<sup>5</sup> While I would certainly not want to deny that children are an important part of a society, or that women, who have traditionally functioned as their primary caretakers, are as a group more familiar with them than are men, or even that Chodorow and Gilligan have provided a compelling basis for feminist reform, I do want take issue with the idea that women, or their morality, either can or should be described outside the culturally-specific discourses which provide the language and structures of value itself. In making this argument, I shall not enter the ongoing debate about whether or not there is an empirical basis for the idea that women possess a separate morality--a debate still raging in philosophical circles--or whether or not this idea can serve as a viable platform for feminist theory and politics. Instead, I shall address the ways in which the discourse of sympathy in twentieth-century texts still reveals an asymmetrical structure of power analogous to that of eighteenth-century ethical treatises.

That the asymmetrical structures of power intrinsic to contemporary versions of the discourse of sympathy are not immediately apparent lends truth to Foucault's comment that power is "tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (1981, 86). The purpose of this chapter, accordingly, is first to "de-

essentialize" the association between women and compassion by reading it as part of a masculinist system of representation through which both men and women are inscribed. In order to do this, I shall examine Max Scheler's The Nature of Sympathy, a foundational text in which, as I shall illustrate, the male-biased hierarchy of values implicit in the ethics of sympathy all along remains intact. Here sympathy is represented as a "universal" construct, but this argument is predicated on the existence of some "natural" sympathy thought to exist between any mother and her child, a bond which simultaneously excludes her from culture. While Scheler's text has been embraced by radical humanist philosophers (many of whom are writing within an explicitly Christian tradition) and ignored by feminist psychoanalytic critics (who nevertheless come to many of the same conclusions) attests, I believe, to the way in which the psychology, humanism, and the discourse of sympathy are mutually implicated. Arguments about women's moral value have shifted from moral to psychological ground; at the same time, the history of ethical writing that helped articulate the terms of these arguments is increasingly obscured. The second purpose of this chapter, then, is to explore briefly the parallels between Scheler's arguments for moral reform and those of an extremely influential feminist writer, Carol Gilligan. I shall conclude with some comments about the import of this phenomena.



### Max Scheler's Maternal Body

By the twentieth century, the gender-specific roles promoted by writers from Shaftesbury to Darwin were naturalized by a more concrete division of labor, and equally important, perhaps, by the rise of the social sciences. Correspondingly, with the work of Max Scheler, this asymmetrical structure of sympathy is rewritten into an ontological framework borrowed from the neo-Kantians. In the one hundred and fifty years between Smith and Scheler, however, the most important shift in the ethics of sympathy is in the way these now-traditional roles were beginning to be revalued. Like his contemporary Heidegger, Scheler had become disillusioned with the civilization that Hume and Smith had struggled so diligently to promote. In a familiar formulation, Scheler complains that modern civilization has led to what he calls "hypertrophy of the intellect." Appealing to a myth of origins which, as we have seen, goes back to Rousseau, Scheler asserts that a once-natural and universal ability to identify with the emotions of others has been lost. This, of course, is a disease peculiar to men which a more comprehensive ethics of sympathy is thought to redeem. Like Smith, Hume, Wordsworth, and Rousseau, Scheler locates "natural" sympathetic response in the female body. But perhaps because his culture is more domesticated, or perhaps because of the influence of Darwin, or perhaps because, as Deleuze suggests, the twentieth century is so thoroughly Oedipalized,<sup>6</sup> Scheler grounds his theory of sympathy in the maternal body alone, in a now-valorized relationship between any mother and her child.

Before addressing the significance of this founding trope for contemporary ethics, it is helpful, I believe, to examine the metaphysical gestures by which its relationship to earlier theories of sympathy are obscured.

Many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theories of sympathy--unlike those of Smith and Hume--will attempt to draw an analogy between the moral and the physical worlds. A popular version of sympathy to which I alluded but did not discuss emanates from eighteenth-century studies in electromagnetics, and from works such as Gerard's Essay on Taste.

As the magnet selects from a quantity of matter the ferruginous particles, which happen to be scattered through it, without making an impression on other substances; so imagination, by a similar sympathy, equally inexplicable, draws out from the whole compass of nature such ideas as we have occasion for, without attending to any others. (173-74)

Similarly, for Scheler, the world is an indissoluble corporeal unity, and there exists a "natural" and "universal" relationship between the moral and the physical world.

The heart possesses, within its own realm, a strict analogon of logic, which it does not, however, borrow from the realm of the intellect. As the ancient doctrine of the nomos agraphos can already teach, there are laws written into it which correspond to the

plan according to which the world, as a world of values, is built up. It can love and hate blindly, or with evidence, just as we can judge blindly or with evidence. (xii)

Reasoning from this unity, and relying on an analogy drawn from physics, Scheler claims that every "moral motion", such as the love of A for B, awakens a "corresponding" love in B to A, hence of the love of C and D, and so forth: "and thus the wave travels on in the moral universe from C to D and E and F into infinity. And the same applies to hate, injustice, and every kind of sin" (xxx).<sup>7</sup>

Whereas Smith and Hume had explicitly addressed the problem of language and culture in guaranteeing sympathetic response, metaphysical theories of sympathy simply remove the problem of signification from speech and writing to physics and biology, to more "stable" modes of discourse. One advantage of this strategy is that it simultaneously protects the sympathetic imagination from historical change. Consequently, such analogies between the moral and physical worlds may be read as figures with a concrete purpose. In Gerard's account, the sympathetic imagination, a mode of cognition, functions like magnetism to regulate the impressions one receives from "nature"; in Scheler's description, the sympathetic imagination, which is a sound-wave in the world of morality, ensures that feeling emanating from a single point will reverberate through the universe. While one writer relies upon simile and the other relies upon metaphor, both analogies serve to represent the sympathetic

imagination as logical, coherent, and universal--even though its mechanisms are, in the words of Gerard, "inexplicable", and, as Scheler suggests, apparent in "God's eyes" only.

However, as I shall illustrate, in Scheler's The Nature of Sympathy this extended comparison between the natural and moral world is simply a metalepsis, in which the central, or grounding figure is omitted. This privileged trope--the figure guaranteeing's Scheler system--is the mother-child relationship. First, Scheler argues that unlike men, women have been protected from the insidious forces of civilization. Second, in an account which Chodorow will denaturalize in her theory of development, Scheler argues that a special "connection" is derived from the original unity between the mother and child, where the loved one was a "spatial and corporeal 'part' of the one who loves" (25). Thus any mother, he claims, bears a biological code of signals enabling her "to know" the child in an intimate way. In a familiar formulation, Scheler offers as an example of this "intuitive psycho-somatic unity" the ability of the mother to diagnose her child's illness, even though a team of medical professionals will have tried and failed. "It may be added," he writes,

that woman, as such, still possesses powers of intuition which, being based on the maternal instinct with its specialized aptitudes for identification, are found only rudimentarily in man--nor has he anything to replace them. This capacity first develops,

no doubt, in a woman's own experience of maternity, but it is not confined to her own child, or to children generally, for it extends, when fully developed, to all the world. (32)

Generally speaking, representing a particular mode of engenderment as "natural" allows Scheler to erect his system on the body of the mother, which, in turn, functions as a universalizing metaphor through which the body of the world may be constituted. The mother-child connection, an intuitive field of signification, is represented as the source of moral and physical unity, through which nature might be restored. In passing, Scheler reinforces twentieth-century domestic roles: all females are represented as real or potential mothers, endowed with the qualities that this role ideally implied: the mother should be loving, nurturing, and, most of all, knowing. Her sympathy, he writes, "extends, when fully developed, to all the world."

While this description of the redeeming power of a mother's love may strike some people as being experientially valid, that is not my issue here. I believe it to be significant that, within the text proper, the maternal body is a largely undifferentiated field of affective forces that simply serves as proof of sympathy, or of sympathetic connection. The maternal body, in short, serves to "naturalize" and "humanize" the body of the world on which Scheler's metaphysical theories are dependent. The final irony of Scheler's text, moreover, is that while the maternal

body is valorized, these morally generative qualities remove the mother from the culture she is thought to redeem. He argues that in order to produce and "read" the forces of sympathy naturally (as does the mother) it is necessary to exist outside the bounds of "civilization" as such. In a list whose members have in common being "other" to educated men, Scheler claims that this residual sympathy may also be found in "primitives, children, dreamers, neurotics of a certain type, and in hypnotic subjects" (31). Despite that the fact that female sympathy is a cherished commodity in Scheler's text, for him as for Smith, it resides in the pre- and the meta-linguistic, which is to say, in the marginalized and unempowered, outside of history and "civilization" as such. Women, or more precisely, their reproductive powers, are simply rewritten as the moral center of an intellectual community from which women simultaneously have been displaced.

Scheler's reliance upon the maternal body as the source and proof of sympathetic connection attests to the way the founding tropes of sympathy are social constructions, subject to historical change. In the eighteenth-century, for example, the mother-child relationship is represented as inimical to the progress of true sympathetic understanding. Compare Scheler's idealization of the maternal body with Smith's representation of a mother, who, upon hearing her child cry, can formulate no idea of its troubles:

What are the pangs of a mother, when she  
hears the moanings of her infant that during

the agony of disease cannot express what it feels? In her idea of what it suffers, she joins, to its real helplessness, her own consciousness of its helplessness, and her own terrors for the unknown consequences of its disorder; and out of all these, forms, for her own sorrow, the most complete image of misery and distress. (TMS 12)

Here, the mother-child relationship forms the negative, as it were, of "true" sympathetic identification. The child, unable to articulate its complaints, enjoins no sympathy, but merely provokes helplessness and terror in the would-be sympathizer, whose animated imagination formulates the worst possible scenario. A product of culture, sympathy is inextricably bound to the possibility of self-narration, to a fiction through which one attempts to bridge the gap between self and other. In Scheler's account, "self-representation" is simply naturalized, or represented as a universal quality of the body itself, which mothers know how to "read."

On the other hand, Scheler's overt systematizing is analogous to eighteenth-century theories, in that they share common strategies or intentions: in their universalizing impulses, theories of sympathy are metalepses which will always reveal their founding trope. This trope--here, the mother-child relation--stands in for, and thus obscures, the problem of signification, or how to guarantee a relationship between self and other. While the founding trope could be interpreted either as regressive/analeptic or

utopic/proleptic, depending upon one's methodological concerns, its intentionality remains the same. This trope establishes the feminine as the necessary figure through which sympathy is guaranteed, although this requires her displacement, or exclusion, from the culture she is thought to generate or restore. Clearly, her "natural" ability to sympathize is in direct and necessary relation to her absence of "intellect", or to the thoughtful judgment necessary for citizenship in a public world. And even more clearly, sympathy is implicated in the dominant values of a patriarchal culture, from which women are, on the basis of gender role alone, it seems, excluded.

Scheler's The Nature of Sympathy is a fascinating, almost uncanny, study in itself; it protects and valorizes many cultural assumptions many feminists have attempted to debunk, if only because we have come to distrust, without much hesitation, the totalizing projects of high modernism. Yet the connection between the maternal body and "womanly sympathy" retains an elliptical relation to twentieth-century valorizations of "feminine" sympathy in modern utopias which also work within a binary. Or, more precisely, within a hierarchy of values that is intimately bound to the rise of capitalism itself. In every case, the female is identified with a structure of care and responsiveness set apart from the world of work. Precisely because women are excluded, it is assumed, they can serve as a viable source of social change. This raises an important issue. Is the status of "feminine" as outsider an accident of the discourse of



sympathy, or is it, instead, a necessary exclusion, a central part of the logic by which the discourse of sympathy works? I shall address this question--and its import--in the section that follows.

### **The Psychologizing of Ethics: A Different Voice**

Recently, the discourse of sympathy has been appropriated by "mainstream" writers who articulate what has been called a "minimal utopia" of social life, characterized, writes one critic, by "nurturant, caring, expressive and nonrepressive relations between self and other, self and nature" (Benhabib and Cornell 4). Central to this effort is Carol Gilligan's A Different Voice, in which Gilligan argues for the presence of a gender-specific ethical sensibility. This work is largely revisionary. Whereas Lawrence Kohlberg's traditional studies of morality privileged notions such as rights and duties, the hereditary province of men, Gilligan argues that women have their own morality which she terms "the ethics of care." Against Kohlberg, Gilligan explains this phenomenon largely through a competing theory of development. Following Piaget, Kohlberg had forwarded a notion of moral maturity that is inextricably bound to individuation, and in which women were found to be deficient (Gilligan 18-19). As Gilligan points out, this study is biased in its evaluation of female morality because "the very traits that traditionally have defined the 'goodness' of women, their care for and sensitivity to the needs of others, are those that mark them as deficient in moral development" (Gilligan 18). A Different

Voice, in contrast, is theoretically informed by the psychoanalytic theories of Nancy Chodorow. Revising Freud's negative account of female development, Chodorow had argued that girls, parented by a person of the same gender, "emerge with a stronger basis [than do boys] for experiencing another's needs or feelings as one's own" (Gilligan 8). Gilligan's interviews with some two-hundred women and men on moral situations support Chodorow's conclusion that unlike men, "women not only define themselves within a context of human relationships but also judge themselves in term of their ability to care" (Gilligan 17). Whereas men construct the moral problem in terms of rights, women, she claims, construct it in terms of interaction, relationship, and responsibility.

While few people would deny that by locating feminine morality in a neo-Freudian theory of female psychological development, Gilligan has made an important contribution to psychoanalytic theory and to mainstream feminist ethics alike, A Different Voice is a controversial work for feminists. Whereas Barbara Houston defends the idea of a "feminine" morality as a viable basis for moral reform, others have expressed concern that Gilligan is simply reinforcing sexist notions of femininity. Judy Auerbach, for example, has raised the objection that precisely because Gilligan is interested in individual development, she does not attend to the larger cultural factors influencing and surrounding her subjects' moral constructs. Instead, she begins her book with the following disclaimer:

No claims are made about the origins of the differences described or their distribution in a wider population, across cultures, or through time. Clearly, these differences arise in a social context where factors of social status and power combine with reproductive biology to shape the experiences of males and females and the relations between the sexes. (Gilligan 2)

In so doing, Gilligan not only ignores the social construction of feminine morality, but ignores the way in which this ethics of care is presently implicated in the reinforcement and promotion of masculine power (Auerbach, et al. 153).

A second and related objection to A Different Voice emanates from feminists are troubled by the way such sweeping accounts of psycho-sexual development ignore social and historical differences between women. Thus Fraser and Nicholson have taken issue with the fact that Gilligan posits an alternative "feminine" model of moral development; this, they point out, invites the "same charges of false generalization she herself had raised against Kohlberg" (Fraser and Nicholson 99). As these critics continue, to the extent that she described women's moral development in terms of a different voice; to the extent that she did not specify which women, under which specific historical circumstances, have spoken with the voice in

question; and to extent that she grounded her analysis in the cross-cultural framework of Nancy Chodorow, her model remained essentialist. It perpetuated in a newer, more localized fashion traces of previous, more grandiose quasi metanarratives. (99)

From this avowedly post-modernist and decidedly feminist perspective, Gilligan perpetuates a modernist notion of gender-identity which a more "pragmatic and fallibilistic" feminist theory would avoid. Instead of a "different voice," they argue, feminists should focus upon the ways in which "different voices" have worked in alliance, but not without conflict, toward more or less common goals (102).

In retrospect, it is possible to see how such critiques have influenced my accounts of Dorothy Wordsworth, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Hannah More. Yet the objection to Gilligan's study I want to raise here is considerably more limited, and probably quite predictable. To define women this way is not only to deny differences between individual women, which is a political problem with immediate effects; it is also, as I have insisted, to embrace a mode of engenderment actively promoted by a history of male-biased texts. And that, I would argue, is a theoretical one, involving the nature of value-formation itself.

As George Sher has pointed out, "Women's moral judgments may be expressed in a different voice, but that voice echoes through some quite familiar rooms" (179). These "rooms," of course, are located in eighteenth-century arguments for

middle-class moral reform--in the ethical writing of Hume, Smith, Burke, and others, which we have already explored. Yet it is perhaps helpful to rehearse again those arguments here. In the mid-eighteenth century, as I have illustrated, "sympathy" became a code-term for social homogeneity among upwardly mobile middle-class men, a way of "knowing," or a principle of communication, or a desire to create relationships between equally-aspiring middle-class men. The structure and ideological power of this discourse, however, are dependent upon a "feminized" version of sympathy, or upon what Adam Smith calls the "exquisite fellow-feeling" of females. For Smith, women are largely passive receptacles for the emotions of others, characterized by the ability to "grieve for their sufferings, to resent their injuries, and to rejoice at their good fortune" (TMS 200). Recognition of the "intermediate" existence which women had been granted lead writers as diverse as Mary Wollstonecraft and Hannah More to re-value the feminine by qualifying those virtues and casting them as source of a largely middle-class program for moral reform. In this sense, the early history of feminism is in many ways the history of re-valuation, in which de-valued traits and roles are endowed with equal or greater merit than the practices and qualities thought to characterize men.

Gilligan, having inherited this male-biased hierarchy of value, appropriates a by-now familiar feminist strategy, and calls for yet another round of middle-class moral reform spearheaded by women. Like Mary Wollstonecraft's, moreover, her moral program is thought to begin within the structures

of the middle-class family. Presumably, Gilligan shares Chodorow's call for a wholesale attempt at co-parenting. Were both men and women to assume responsibility for children, it is assumed, the moral dispositions of their children would not be so clearly "masculine" or "feminine"; or, if they were, feminine sensibility would not as a result of being "feminine" be abhorred. However plausible this program is in theory, in making women's compassion the source of moral reform, Gilligan further legitimizes an association between women and feeling for others that, as I have argued, is both derived from and appeals to a masculinist system of ethics. Consequently, from an historical point of view, Gilligan's "solution" to the problem of women's traditionally inferior moral value bears a troubling resemblance to its cause.

What her argument elides is that fact that the ethics of sympathy turn upon a definition of the "feminine" as that which exists outside public life, upon a notion of that yet-uncorrupted "other" which can still serve as the site or model for future social reform. The religious overtones of this argument--the notion that man can somehow be "redeemed"--are not quite so disturbing as the suggestion that, in this system, the moral value of woman is dependent upon her ability to serve at that role, to serve, in short, as the embodiment of "suffering humanity" upon which man's pleasure, power, and moral superiority are based. To put it another way, it is the status of woman as outsider to a largely homosocial system that enables her to have any moral value in the first place, even while, through that system, the

secondary status of women is virtually guaranteed. As Gilligan admits, it is precisely because men are pushed toward separation and individuation that they devalue others around them, even though they suffer from that separation. And as Scheler announces, culture is promoted and sustained by hypertrophy of the intellect, through which men are divorced from their historical ability to identify with the emotions of others. In each case, "feminine" morality is defined by the way it embodies different values that those thought to be necessary not only to the "public" world, but to the moral community as such.

This exclusion of women from "full moral agency," as Kathryn Pauley Morgan has illustrated, is not an omission which is easily corrected through internal reform. It is, instead, intrinsic to the history of ethical writing itself, where it has assumed any number of forms. One of these is the promotion of a doctrine of separate spheres. "We are first told," she writes, "that there is a moral domain in which we achieve excellence":

Then we are told that we can only achieve excellence in that domain. Then we are told that this domain is not a domain in which morality operates in its most exemplary way if at all. And finally we are blamed for living our moral lives in that domain while being told that we can do no other. (153)

The result of this process, Morgan continues, is "moral confusion" on the part of women, "if not outright madness"

(153). While the suggestion that male-biased moral systems have been responsible for women's "madness" is provocative--one thinks, for example, of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Virginia Woolf, and Sylvia Plath, all of whom were interested in the relation between sympathy and the oppression of women--it also raises the more immediate issue of feminist complicity. Given the intrinsically male-biased nature of this moral system, it is possible to argue that in treating any structure of care as an identifiable feminine emotional construct--or, for that matter, in treating "ambition" as a masculine one--Gilligan simply reinforces a major form of ethical inscription practiced by patriarchal culture. A Different Voice is from this perspective unwillingly implicated in the asymmetrical value-formation of the culture it seeks to reform.<sup>8</sup>

#### The Writing of Value(s)

Throughout this study I have approached sympathy as an historical problem which, moreover, is dependent upon a system of representation. My treatment has undoubtedly appeared, at times, to be overly abstract--too cumbersome or too heavy-handed for the fragile and ephemeral history of the "emotions" which were being examined. At this point, however, it is perhaps possible to see why this discursive approach was necessary: only by explaining how power works on the behalf of specific interests can one analyze the opportunities for resistance to it. By treating sympathy as a mode of representation I have attempted to establish those



opportunities. I have not, however, provided a solution. While it is possible to argue that there is nothing intrinsically valuable (or value-less) about the traditional roles of women--about their roles as wife, helpmate, or mother--which can be corrected or altered through their denial, or, alternatively, through a revision of the values by which they have been defined, such an idea undoubtedly conflicts with some of women's (and men's) deepest and most cherished beliefs. One can explain and negotiate those beliefs, as does Carol Gilligan; one can promote them, as does Max Scheler; or, at least for the sake of analysis, one can deny them, if only long enough to understand the way in which the logic of sympathy works.

In order to do this, it has been necessary, from time to time, to take issue with some forms of psychoanalytic criticism. Lest those objections be misinterpreted, I would like to end by casting them within some more concrete frame. Throughout this study, I have insisted that sympathy has reference to one of several dominant discourses--ethics, aesthetics, religion, or metaphysics--all of which are involved in the self-conscious writing of value. Each of these disciplines would have us believe its own claims to ontological, metaphysical, or psychological "truth," and each necessarily will define the truth of sympathy in a different way. To this list I would now add some types of feminism, in which, as we have seen, the writing of value plays a central part, even while the historically constructed systems of value by which those are underwritten has been increasingly

obscured. This is particularly apparent in the relationship between psychoanalytic criticism and the ethics of sympathy. Here critics such as Carol Gilligan not only take the claims of sympathy at face value, they perpetuate the doctrine of separate virtues itself. What seems to be called for, then, is re-thinking of the relationship between ethics and psychology from an historicist point of view.

Agnes Heller, a member of the Frankfurt school, has begun this project, if only by virtue of her desire to revive ethics as a viable and pervasive dimension of culture. Heller associates the apparent disappearance of ethics with the rise of modern psychology (Heller 1988, 140). Rather than assuming, however, that psychology followed and replaced ethics in some clean and definitive way, she focuses upon how these two apparently discrete and even antithetical discourses are mutually implicated. She argues that in the early modern age, with the work of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Smith, Hume, and others, moral judgment was increasingly associated with theories of perception derived from the associationists, or with a fledgling psycho-aesthetics. In Heller's words, "emotions and passions gained prominence as pains and pleasures in the process of delivering new values and norms" (1988, 140). Characteristicks, A Treatise of Human Nature, and The Theory of Moral Sentiments ushered in what we know as "The Age of Sensibility," which we identify largely through its competing theories of "generative feeling" and its wholesale cultivation of "sensitivities." Yet according to Heller's scheme, what began as the moralization of

sentiments in the mid-eighteenth century continues, in the nineteenth, as the cult of sentiments as virtues in their own right" (1988, 143). Through the psychologizing of morals, morality increasingly becomes identified with particular emotions, or with emotion as such.

Following this analysis, it is easy to see why, from a contemporary perspective, "sympathy," "compassion," "pity," and "benevolism"--even in the nineteenth century--were so easily stripped from their discursive contexts, and treated as emotions in their own right. According to Heller, moreover, the most decisive stage in the collapse of ethics as a recognizable discourse corresponds with the work of Freud, where any such emotion becomes symptomatic of an individual's complex or problem. She complains that within psychology, moral norms and virtues, human goodness and badness, are no longer explicated, or promoted, but are explained away by psychological causes (1988, 143). Within the confines of the analytic situation, and under the auspices of a seemingly objective theory, norms, perceptions, and morality-laden emotions thus "become epiphenomena subject to cure":

Choice, moral autonomy, is thus negated and people are treated as machines--machines which, in the event of malfunction are repaired by the professional mechanic, the psychologist. (1988, 143)

As a writer who would revive ethics as a viable and pervasive dimension of culture, Heller deplores the seemingly

subversive work of Freud, and presumably, that of neo-Freudians, as well. Given the decidedly feminist and self-critiquing nature of much contemporary psychoanalytic criticism, Heller's may be interpreted as a conservative stance. Yet whether or not one shares this distrust of psychology--what Heller calls the colonization of the soul by scientific discourse (1988, 143)--is less important, for the moment, than the effect of the relationship between ethics and psychology on feminist theory and practice.

While I do not want to represent ethics as a meta-discourse which descends from above to endow women and men with particular feelings, behaviors, and social roles in some unproblematic way, I do believe that as one part of larger discursive formations ethics can often provide a key to how values are constructed, or to how individuals are encouraged to react to themselves as social beings within a particular culture, at a particular time. In the eighteenth century, as we have seen, the writing of value was a "public" phenomena, promoted not only through ethical treatises, but through literature, political tracts, travel books, and the ubiquitous book of "manners." In each case ethical language served to create or reinforce social institutions (including the middle class family), to define and dictate responses to particular social groups (including women and the poor), to elaborate "appropriate" attitudes towards oneself (in terms of value), and--through all of these--to inscribe culturally-necessary forms of community, held together by a vast network of ideological bonds, dependent upon the "language of

feeling."

Yet in this century, "feeling" is often assumed to be a private phenomena. Within the bounds of psychoanalysis, the language of feeling can at most be "read" as being symptomatic of an individual's psycho-sexual structure, which, in turn, is thought to be derived from the two or three persons who constitute the family itself. Missing from such accounts is the way that "feeling" functions as a public phenomena to create the structures of value by which we are all directly or indirectly defined; missing from these accounts, that is, is an analysis of the nature of value-formation itself, even while, I would argue, the writing of value provides at least some of the evidence upon which the interpretive structures of psychoanalysis are founded. It is no accident, for example, that the discourse of sympathy promotes the importance of the "domestic affections" while the psychoanalytic tradition uses those as the basis of its assumptions about the "development" of individuals. Nor is it surprising that both feminist psychoanalytic critics and traditional Christian humanists should come to similar conclusions about the nature and value of women in an era that promotes "the domestic affections" and "family values." It is because psychology analyzes the structure of the feelings that the writing of value is designed to promote, I believe, that the discourse of sympathy and psychology are easily conflated into a single ideology in which the moral qualities of women are represented as being both different from and more--or less--valuable than the moral qualities of

men.

This apparent conjunction between the message, if not the method, of ethics and psychology is important to the future of ethics as a viable means of social reform, but even more important, one would think, to feminist politics and theory. Given the domination of psychoanalytic discourse in this century, it may seem more crucial for literary critics to expose the anti-feminist assumptions at the heart of Freudianism than to turn, again, to those hopelessly utopic or sentimental writers who attempted to inspire "the good life." But such an omission may also reflect a twentieth-century tendency towards empiricism that in fact ignores the historicity of the problems it seeks to expose.

Our own psychologizing tendencies have colored our readings of ourselves, and thus our readings of the culture around us, without at the same time dissipating institutionalized social values and norms. Through the language and assumptions of psychology, ethics as an easily recognizable, still-operable mode of discourse has simply been obscured, without at the same time being completely displaced. In fact, as I have tried to show here, through theories of moral development the male-biased structure of ethical writing has in some ways been reinforced without sufficient attention to the writing of value itself. Given that her two-hundred subjects live in an asymmetrical culture, it is not surprising to me that Gilligan is able to identify a gender-specific morality. In a society which has traditionally confined women to specific non-public and/or

supportive roles--nurturer, housekeeper, secretary, nurse, assistant--it is reasonable to assume that women would learn to value the traits to which they have been assigned, even though those roles may be complicitous in maintaining their secondary position. The alternative to Gilligan's position, however, is not necessarily, with Hannah Arendt, to dismiss the ethics of compassion,<sup>9</sup> but to examine those in terms of the structures of power which--albeit unwittingly--they perpetuate and uphold. Because my own examination has focused upon the historical association between the "feminine" and "compassion" as that is created through the discourse of sympathy, I, too, can be accused of perpetuating a "metanarrative" at least as problematical as Gilligan's; yet my narrative, I believe, has less-stabilizing results. I have attempted to show, to borrow words from Foucault, how "that-which-is has not always been," or how "the things which seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history" (1988, 37). Having done that, I would simply encourage literary critics to examine the language of feeling not for what it says about "woman," but for what it says about the way women are written into systems of value to which, using much the same language, they are forced to respond.

### Notes to Conclusion

1. See Newton 1987. By the 1840s or so, feminine "humanitarianism" would serve a complicated and necessary public role: to facilitate a sense of community and social concern in "disillusioned" middle-class men which, in the words of Judith Newton, "a reformulation of classical liberal and masculine ideology itself called for" (128).

2. Prior to that time, Newton continues, "classical liberal ideology with its emphasis upon material production...is more dominant, and so is its construction of middle-class masculine experience as acquisition, competition, rationality, self-dependence, and hard work" (1987, 127).

3. Chodorow herself addresses this charge: "I agree that all claims about gender differences gloss over important differences within genders and similarities between genders" (215). At the same time, she insists that there are "structural and statistical truths" about such differences that are not threatened by such objections.

4. I should emphasize that my objections to Chodorow's theories of masculine and feminine moral development have little to do with their empirical validity within a twentieth-century context. I object, instead, to the way in which this peculiarly modern and sociologically-based account is often imposed without qualification upon a different historical period, in which many of the phenomena that Chodorow presupposes--the sexual division of labor, the middle-class family, the "absent father," the "isolated mother," and, finally, the cult of the child which unites those--were coming into being, a process that necessarily involves contradiction and struggle. Chodorow's response to this charge is somewhat confusing. On the one hand, she admits that her account "does not concern the reproduction of mothering for all time," that "different factors have gone into the reproduction of mothering in different societies and different historical periods" (216). On the other hand, given her psycho-sexual account of gender-specific dispositions, such differences would not seem to have much of an effect: "it is probable that the issues I discuss are relevant in all societies" (216). In this sense, she is at least open to the charge of ahistoricity and universalism.

5. This movement in philosophy comes after, or is accompanied by, revisionist critiques which have attended to "deontological" systems of ethics, or to a tradition of moral theory which valorizes "reason" culminating in Kant's notion of individual autonomy and categorical imperative at the basis of moral theory. Feminist critics have focused on Kant's reification of reason at the expense of feeling as a masculinist mode of domination; ideological critics have concentrated on the relationship between the Kantian transcendental subject and bourgeois individualism; both end



up recommending a more politically progressive relationship to the "other." Consequently, in recent years, several anti-Kantians have advocated a return to the less systematic ethics of Smith, Hume, and others, with a renewed focus on friendship, benevolism, altruism, and sympathy. See Young 57-67.

6. See Deleuze and Guattari 1983. Cornel West has pointed out that Foucault and Deleuze were the first important French intellectuals "to think through the notion of difference independent of Hegelian ideas of opposition" and thus to "circumvent, rather than confront, Hegel" (275). For these and other reasons, the insights of Deleuze and Foucault are central to the discussions that follow.

7. Scholars of eighteenth-century writing will note parallels between Scheler's account of the sympathetic imagination and Pope's description of the "System of Benevolence" in Essay on Man (361-372) in which the source of sympathy is not "the maternal body," as in Scheler, but "nature."

8. It is significant, I believe, that Gilligan's "solution" to this problem, much like Wollstonecraft's, is necessarily proleptic--it depends upon the success of future generations. In the meantime, she can but counter the asymmetrical structure of modern society with a call for a "dialogue" between masculine and feminine sensibilities, or between the ethics of fairness and care (Gilligan 174). To paraphrase Marx, this is simply to fight "phrases" with "phrases," and to believe that social change will come about through an alteration in "consciousness" itself--if not in this generation, then in the next one. For a similar argument that reaches different conclusions, see Tronto.

9. In On Revolution Arendt argues that compassion cannot serve as the basis of a politics because compassion precludes political action. Clearly that is not the case, as Kathleen Jones demonstrates. My own argument emanates from concern with the relatively conservative and middle-class politics that the ethics of compassion have traditionally provoked.

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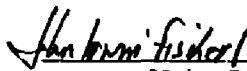
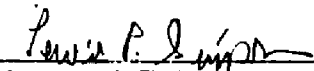
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Lucinda Cole

Major Field: English

Title of Dissertation: Sympathy, Gender and the writing of value in Late-Eighteenth  
Century English letters.

Approved:

   
Major Professor and Chairman

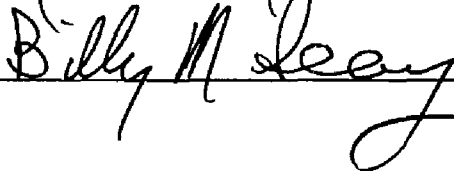
  
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EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

  
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